## Research

# *1988 in Australia: Life and events*

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Were I to draw solely upon my memories of my childhood in Australia during the 1980s as source material for my novel, I’d probably end up creating a golden-syrup fantasy land in which birds flocked to my shoulders wherever I went, and the men and women wearing oversized grey suits and shoulder pads running the country could be taken at their word.

One knows better with age.

A genuine reason why I wanted to set a story in this period was to examine many of the events of the time from which my pre-pubescent youth stole their relevance and interestingness.

Australia had just crawled its way out of recession and was sighing its way into another (Macfarlane, 2006). In 1988 we were told to celebrate the 200th anniversary of English settlement, without really being told why we should, and when people dared to raise such blasphemies as the maltreatment of the Indigenous population *(Museum Victoria n.d.)* or the recent repudiation of the white Australia immigration policy conceived at the nation’s federation, their cries were drowned out by dentally endowed media commentators among the gratuitous flag-waving and shimmering barbeque haze.

Similar to my own adolescent experience, the protagonist in my story will observe most of the events happening beyond his immediate sphere with passivity; oblivious that certain facets of the era affect him and those around him.

My research so far has primarily consisted of looking at major events of 1988, aspects of the environment in which the story is set, and also everyday life, such as the cost of living. While there's no scope to include all my notes and findings, I've provided the main themes.

## Events

A selection of events that took place in 1988, which I plan to indirectly reference in my writing:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| January | |
| A Current Affair | A revamped [A Current Affair](http://aca.ninemsn.com.au/) debuts on Channel Nine, hosted by Jana Wendt. Legistimising the harassment of overweight, foreign rip off merchants and exploiting consumers who have alleged to have landed foul of the Trading Act. |
| Home and Away | Channel 7 broadcasted the first episode of [Home and Away](https://au.tv.yahoo.com/home-and-away) Many rural towns still receive only two television channels, and that's if they're lucky. Viewers therefore greedily gobble up this white bread drama set in the fictional and chloroformic Summer Bay *(IMDB n.d.) .* |
| First Fleet | First Fleet re-enactment on Sydney Harbour, Australia Day Australia marks 200 since the arrival of the 'First Fleet': eleven boats filled mostly with the convicted criminals who were to set the genetic foundation stone for many of its twenty-first century politicians.  To celebrate, they decided to re-enact the voyage (this time without the smallpox and three per cent death rates). Eleven tall ships set out from Portsmouth, England May 13, 1987 and arrived in Sydney Harbour on Jan 26 *(NSW State Library Collection n.d.).* |
| March | |
| Footy | Footy The newly built Sydney Football Stadium hosts its first game of rugby league exciting fans and public drinking houses to frothingly new heights. |
| April | |
| World Expo 1988 | World Expo opens in Brisbane Brisbane finally finds itself on the international and domestic map by presenting it as sophisticated city with a global outlook, instead of an introspective backwater full of piss-swilling bogans. |
| May | |
| New Parliament House | Parliament House opened The Queen attends the opening of the new Parliament House in Canberra *(Parliament of Australia Online, n.d.).* |
| October | |
| Walsh Street police shootings | Walsh Street police shootings Two young Victorian police officers were shot down gang-style in a suburban street, leading to a spate of retaliation murders *(Anderson , 2013).* |

## The Pacific, weather and the natural environment

# Weather

In 1988 the average temperature in northern NSW was 23.7°C, with a high of 43.3°C in January and low of 12.3°C in June. The main summer months of 1988, January and December, received 284.2mm and 247.6mm of rain respectively. On a typical summer's day, the sun would have risen just before 6:00am and set around 8:45pm, allowing plenty of outdoor time *(Australian Bureau of Meteorology n.d.).*

# Flora and fauna

Coastal plant life is diverse but there are some species which dominate the pelagic zones, including bitoe bush, casaurina pines, pandanus, lantana bush and eucalypts of course.

On an average beach fishing trip, you might have caught a snapper, flathead, bream or yellow tail. The rock pools teem with life - crabs, anemone, sponge, snails, and weed *(NSW Department of Primary Industries n.d.).*

## Lifestyle, money and culture

# Cost of living

In 1988, two dollars was a bribe; a Christmas gift from grandma. It was a dollar away from just a loaf of bread, instead of a loaf of bread and half a kilo of chips. Naturally I want to be able accurately cite prices in my novel, so I did some digging around and asked my peers. The 2014 figures are for comparison only.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Cost in 1988 (AUD) | Cost in 2014 (AUD) |
| Bread | $1.20 | $5.50 |
| Milk (1l) | 80c | $2.00 |
| Average weekly income | $431.70 | $1,500 |
| 1 litre of petrol | 53c | $1.55 |
| Packet of crisps (50g) | 25c | $1.80 |
| Mars bar | 25c | $2.52 |
| Glass of beer | $1.80 | $5.50 |
| 3 bedroom house on a block of land | $71,000 | $317,000 |

# *Sources: (Abelson, P., Chung, D., 2004) (Gargett, D., 2010 ) (Queensland Government Statistician's Office: Average weekly earnings, 2013 ) (State Library of Victory, 2014 ) (Wilson, A., 2014)*

# Popular cars

Long before the advent of Priuses and shining 4WD's, the 'Datto 120', even with a rusted out roof, was the coolest contraption on tar, and the apogee of Australian social status was the Holden Commodore.

In 1988, petrol was cheap and the distances were great, and if you'd never cruised at 120km/ph down the highway with your elbow hanging out catching a tan, or driven back from the beach sweating like a dog in a box, you'd never lived... or didn't have a licence.

Ford Falcon versus Holden Commodore was like Windows verse Mac today: there was just no convincing each side of the others' merits, or that they were, in reality, two versions of the same inanity *(Gasnier, 1990).*



*1988 Holden Commodore VN, Ford Falcon*

## 1988 Ford Laser KE GhiaDatsun 120Y

*1988 Ford Laser, Datsun 120Y*

## Crime and policing

# Bikie gangs

One of my lead characters is a member of a bikie group. Bikie groups have a long history of notoriety in Australia, with several groups allegedly involved in organised crime including sales of drugs, weapons, extortion and even religious violence *(Welch, 2009).*

What interests me particularly are the gangs' code of loyalty and ritualistic initiation procedures. 'Noms', or newly nominated members, must always be referred by another member. In order to gain their vests and 'colours' (gang-related patches) it's said that they are often required to perform violent and bizarre acts such as wearing a piss-stained shirt for a year. One the members receives their colours, they have them for life.

Similar to some religions, apostasy is not tolerated and sometimes harshly punished - 'blood in, blood out' is the saying. In 2006, a member of the Finks bikie gang, Christopher Wayne Hudson, defected to the Hell's Angels. The Finks retaliated by shooting Hudson in the face and back *(James, 2008).* And later, in 2007, after shooting two men in Melbourne's CBD, the Hell's Angels reportedly strapped Hudson down and blow-torched off his Hell's Angel tattoo, for "for bringing shame on the club". The same goes, of course, if you talk to the cops.

## Australia Day Bicentennial celebrations and our convict heritage

The 200th anniversary of European settlement: in 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip led the eleven-strong fleet into Sydney Cove to establish the first colony. Aboard the ships were 1480 people including, officers, crew and convicts. While most of the prisoners were British, there were also Americans, French and Africans aboard *(Migration Heritage n.d.).*

Many of the convicts had been sentenced for crimes such as theft, violent crime, break and enter. Jane McManus, age 18, was imprisoned for the theft of goods worth two pounds, 15 shillings. Before sailing to Sydney on the convict ship, Charlotte, Jane had spent a year in a prison hulk in England *(Fellowship of First Fleeters n.d.).*

Two hundred years later, Charles and Diana were looking more uncomfortable than usual together as they basted in the summer sun in front of the Opera House watching on as the tall ships sailed into the harbour. Also on the day singer John Farnham won the Australian of the Year and the biggest Indigenous land rights protest took place. It was all happening on the 26th of January, 1988. If Captain Phillip had been alive to see what he and his fleet had started two centuries earlier, he might have wondered, “How the devil did they build that peculiar bridge?”

## The market

## Compared with the UK and the USA, the Australian fiction market is miniscule. In 2011 sales of fiction in Australia reached $160 million (AUD) *(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).* In the USA, the juvenile fiction market alone was worth $2.78 billion (USD) *(Milliot, 2012).*

## However there are opportunities for writers seeking publication and grants, as suggested by the *Australian Writer's Marketplace Statistics (Australian Writer’s Marketplace, 2008)*:

* **$1.4 million** in prize monies listed in The Australian Writer's Marketplace
* **2,207** publication opportunities and writing industry contacts
* **1081** Australian, New Zealand and online magazines, newspapers and journals
* **284** publishers and publishing services, Australia-wide
* **308** literary organisations
* **243** awards, competitions, fellowships and grants
* **80** creative and professional writing courses
* **70** opportunities for young writers
* **156** markets for poetry
* **106** short story markets
* **89** children's/young adult markets
* **36** contacts for grants, fellowships and residencies
* **47** speculative fiction markets

## Despite the closure of several large book stores in Australia, and the annual turnover slide in book publishing *(Rosenbloom, 2012),* there’s a growing demand for ebooks and the services available to authors to both create and distribute ebooks and other publications are expanding *(Rice, 2013).*

## Since I intend to self-publish, I aim to take advantage of these services, and design and produce my own ebook, probably in epub format.

## Reading material

Books I have read, or am in the process of reading in order to research the history of the Australian coming of age novel.

[**A Fraction of the Whole**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1833852.A_Fraction_of_the_Whole)

Steve Toltz *(2008, Spiegel & Grau)*

[**Breath**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2176735.Breath)

Tim Winton *(2008, Farrar, Straus and Giroux)*

[**I Can Jump Puddles**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1954212.I_Can_Jump_Puddles)

Alan Marshall *(2004, Peguin Books)*

[**I Own the Racecourse!**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4858478-i-own-the-racecourse)

Patricia Wrightson *(1968, Hutchinson Radius)*

[**My Brother Jack**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/20616660-my-brother-jack)

George Johnston *(2013, Angus & Robertson [first published 1964])*

[**Puberty Blues**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/779126.Puberty_Blues)

Kathy Lette, Gabrielle Carey*(2002, Picador [first published 1979])*

[**Storm Boy**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/80461.Storm_Boy)

Colin Thiele *(2006, New Holland Publishing, Australia [first published 1964])*

[**True History of the Kelly Gang**](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/110090.True_History_of_the_Kelly_Gang)

Peter Carey *(2001, Vintage Books)*

## What's next?

Much of the content of my story will be drawn from memory; however I do plan on researching more about the minutiae of daily life (product, brands, fashion), and particularly the inner workings of bikie gangs and NSW policing policies in the 1980s.

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