Australian History Prize

2020 - Winner

Winner
A brilliant and compassionate study. Vivid true stories spill out of these pages, illuminating colonial society with the myriad flares of private suffering.

PROFESSOR TOM GRIFFITHS

BEDLAM at BOTANY BAY

JAMES DUNK
Judges' comments

James Dunk’s *Bedlam at Botany Bay* is a truly innovative book. We are presented with a challenging and confronting history of madness in the early years of New South Wales, constructed from diverse sources including governors’ letters, colonial secretaries’ correspondence, institutional records and private letters. Dunk reveals extraordinary details about how colonial structures, life and circumstances drove people mad, and he invites us to reflect on the implications of the exceptionally coercive nature of a penal colony.

*Bedlam at Botany Bay* draws on a rich scholarship in exploring how the development of the British Empire influenced this aspect of colonial social and political history. We are reacquainted with many familiar names such as Macquarie, Darling and Macarthur, places like the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum (Gladesville), and events including the Rum Rebellion. However, Dunk prompts us to think about this well-trawled time and place in new ways through stories of madness articulated and recorded at the time.

Combining meticulous research and compelling writing, James Dunk’s *Bedlam at Botany Bay* offers readers a strikingly original re-reading of early colonial Australia. Beautifully crafted and deeply empathetic, this is a book with genuine literary and scholarly merit. It makes a significant and invigorating impact on the field of Australian history, and deserves to be read and discussed for many years to come.