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The Ken Pound Collection of children's books

State Library Victoria holds the most comprehensive collection of Australian children's books in any public institution in the world. The Library's Children's Literature Collection fundamentally changed with the acquisition in 1994 of a private collection of 25,000 Australian and New Zealand children's books amassed by Melbourne collector Ken Pound. This took the collection above 100,000 items, increasing the Library's holdings of variant editions, ephemera, advertising, print-based games and short-lived Australian publishing house titles. Today the Library holds approximately 150,000 children's books published over five centuries. This remarkable collection is of world significance.

Ken Pound's passion for children's books is partially explained by his early childhood days spent in an orphanage in England. Then, as a child migrant, he was sent to Australia, where he grew up in institutions. Later in life, Ken became the caretaker of a men's refuge in the inner-city Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy and lived for some years on the premises. His children's book collection occupied a room, a mezzanine and a corridor, with bookshelves often triple shelved, where shelf depth enabled three rows of books to be arranged one in front of each other. Draped from the ceiling above the books was a coloured parachute, and a 'no smoking' sign was a facetious reference to Ken's considerable tobacco habit. Ken frequented fairs and markets for

The Fairy Story That Came True, illustrated by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Australia: British Imperial Oil Co., 192?, cover, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection, JKP A823.2 F16B



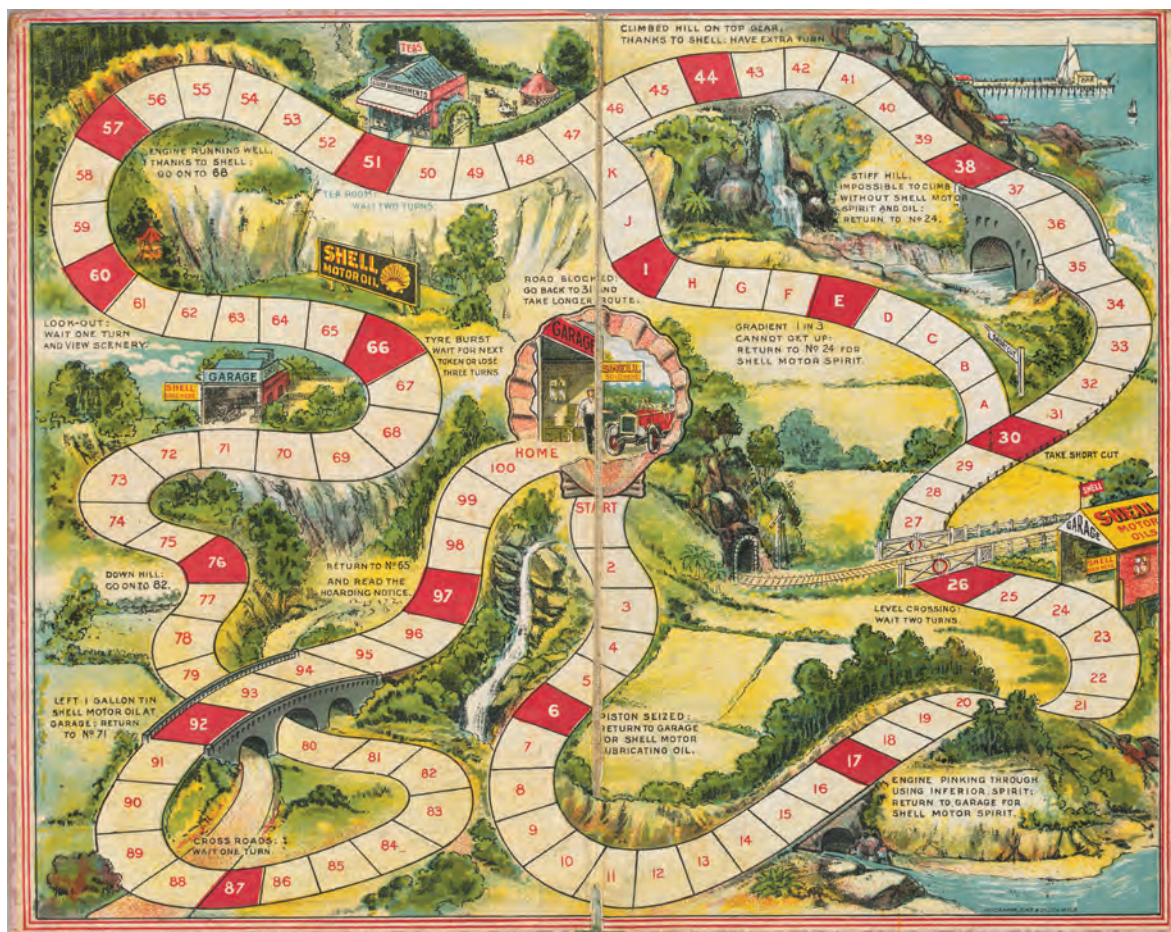


Ken Pound's collection when Ken was the caretaker in a men's refuge in Fitzroy, Melbourne, 1994, photograph by Adrian Flint, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection

25 years, making book selections and carefully consulting his copious notes to discern subtle and overt differences between copies.

In 1994 Ken's imminent retirement prompted him to offer his collection for sale, with the proviso that it be acquired in its entirety rather than as individual items. State Library Victoria saw the possibility of an institutional acquisition and received a grant from the Community Support Fund to proceed.

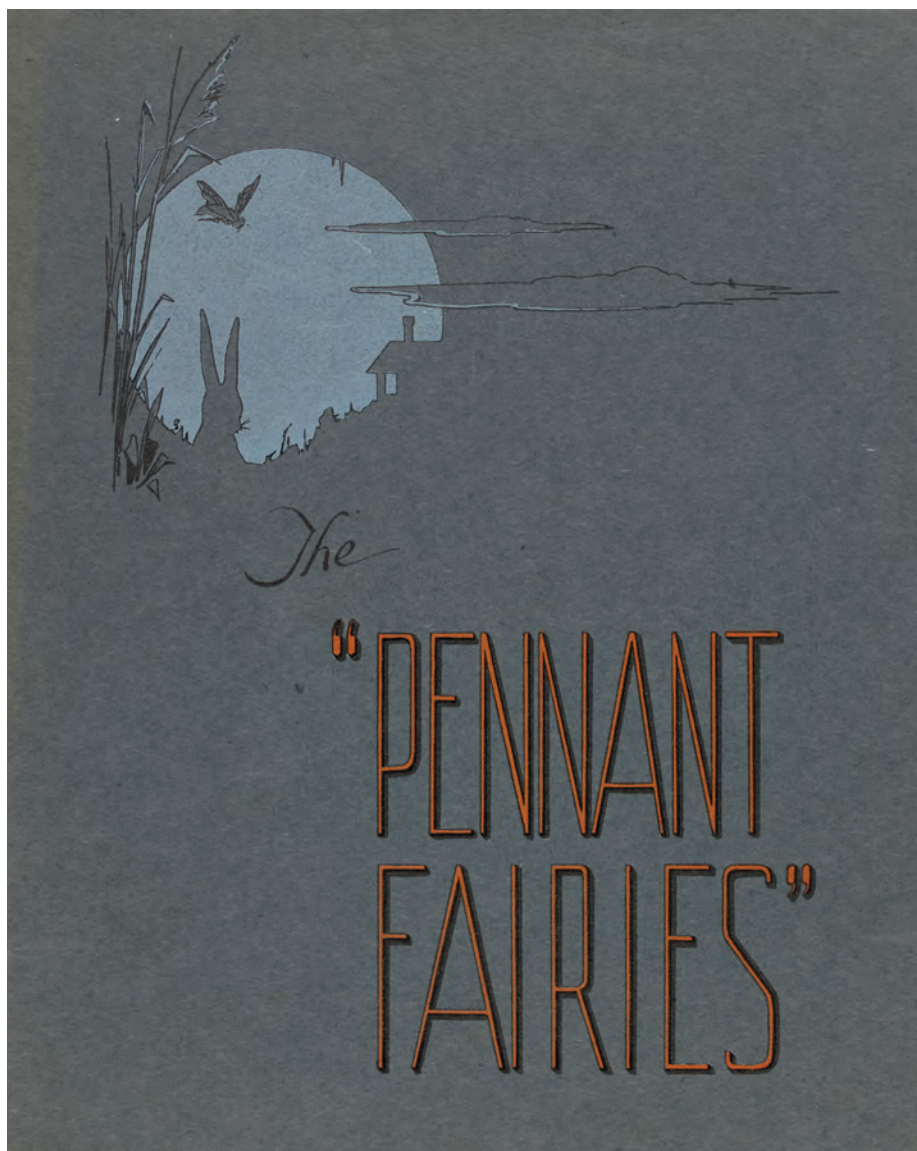
Ken has maintained his connection with the Library's collection staff, and until recently he continued to visit with additions to the collection. It was common to be notified that Ken had dropped in unannounced with a box of items for the JKP collection, the catalogue prefix allocated to Ken's items. Staff were constantly amazed by the weight of the boxes he delivered. Ken now lives in Canberra, and although he is an infrequent emailer, State Library Victoria values his continued interest in and support for the exceptional collection named in his honour.



British Imperial Oil Co. promotional merchandise, 'Shell wins', board game, Melbourne: British Imperial Oil Co., 1927, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection, JLTf 794 SH4B

In selecting items for his collection, Ken considered no children's book too trivial. If it was a previously unseen item published for a child readership, he simply purchased it. When the Library's cataloguing team methodically created online entries for all Ken's items, they discovered a previously undescribed collection of children's books known as the John Mystery books. The cataloguing team leader Derrick Moors¹ and I² have published elsewhere on this previously unknown, short-lived publishing phenomenon.

For researchers, the Ken Pound Collection is a unique resource. In 1984 Marcie Muir, the late bibliographer of Australian children's books, visited Ken in his Fitzroy premises to view an advertising booklet produced by Ackman's Home Furnishings. The booklet was illustrated by the celebrated children's book illustrator Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, and Ken was an avid collector of her works. Subsequently, Muir cited many items unique to Ken's collection in her authoritative 1992 *Australian Children's Books: a bibliography*.³



The Pennant Fairies, Melbourne: British Imperial Oil Co., 1923, cover, Rare Books Collection, LTP A823.3 P381B

Much of the advertising material in the Ken Pound Collection was not widely collected by libraries. The ephemeral, often-unattributed, giveaway advertising items were not perceived as heritage collection material. However, advertising aimed at a child readership is an important element of the Australian children's literary heritage, candidly reflecting social history trends.

The Library holds 12 promotional items by the British Imperial Oil Company. Six of those items address a child readership: a board game, a calendar and four fantasies. In the first half of the 20th century,

The Shell Fairy Calendar



The Queen of the Shell Fairies with some of her Fairy Attendants.

1924		JANUARY					1924	
S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.		
::	::	1	2	3	4	5		
6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
27	28	29	30	31	::	::		

1924

1924		FEBRUARY					1924	
S.	M.	T	W.	T.	F.	S.		
::	::	::	::	::	1	2		
3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
10	11	12	13	14	15	16		
17	18	19	20	21	22	23		
24	25	26	27	28	29	::		

1925		JANUARY					1925	
S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.		
::	::	::	::	1	2	3		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
25	26	27	28	29	30	31		

1925

1925		FEBRUARY					1925	
S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
15	16	17	18	19	20	21		
22	23	24	25	26	27	28		
::	::	::	::	::	::	::	::	



WITH COMPLIMENTS
The British Imperial Oil Co. Ltd.
SHELL LUBRICATING OILS AND MOTOR SPIRIT



Ida Rentoul Outhwaite had an international reputation for her fairy illustrations, and the British Imperial Oil Company engaged her to illustrate two of the fantasies. They employed Outhwaite's attractive fairy illustrations in a context that suggested an ethereal association between natural petroleum deposits, called the 'Spirit of Speed', and the 'Shell Fairies'.

The Sentry and the Shell Fairy, written by George Martin, is an advertising booklet for Shell Oil crafted as a fantasy set in Egypt. The story opens:

It was one of those clear nights seen so often in tropical countries. The moon shone with that brilliance boys and girls of the desert know so well, and its very stillness seemed to fill the air with myriad tiny voices.⁴

The sentry on duty at the Great Pyramid hears a voice that invites him to visit the queen's chamber. There, the queen of the Shell Fairies describes how, many centuries ago, when Egypt was ruled by a wise and kind ruler, corn and other foods were abundant. Construction of the Great Pyramid proceeded slowly, as the stone cutter's wheels could only operate with limited speed and the derricks that lifted the stones groaned, squeaked then stopped if they were run too quickly. The Shell Fairies brought a beautiful oil from a country far away across the sea to replace the fat, greasy substance the men had been using, and the Great Pyramid was completed. Then the Shell Fairies gave to Australia and New Zealand their secret of Shell Motor Lubricating Oil.

The Fairy Story That Came True is set in Fairyland. One day, the queen of the Shell Fairies, in passing the entrance to a large cave, hears a tiny voice inviting her inside. She is led to a big reservoir of white liquid, which the voice says is the Spirit of Speed. Later, an avalanche seals the cave and traps all the fairies inside. The voice comforts the distraught queen and the Shell Fairies with the explanation that the white liquid will become stronger, purer and sweeter with time and that one day a search for the Spirit of Speed will commence. Subsequently, a large reservoir is discovered deep underground on the island of Sumatra, the Spirit of Speed is released, and today is known as Shell Motor Spirit. The gendered final paragraph concludes:

Tell Daddy that he can use these same pure drops of the Spirit of Speed in his motor car. And if he does – why he'll be just as happy as were the Shell Fairies.⁵

Published 50 years apart, the two Yates advertising booklets reveal changes in narrative voice, perceptions of child reader interests and booklet design. *The Garden Year of Mr. Bear* is narrated by Uncle Koala and offers a monthly guide

THE SENTRY AND THE SHELL FAIRY



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George W Martin, *The Sentry and the Shell Fairy*, illustrated by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Melbourne: Shell, 1925-30, cover, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection, JKP A823.2 M363S



The Garden Year with Mr. Bear, Sydney: Arthur Yates & Co., 1940, cover, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection, JKP 635.024054 G16Y

to growing flowers and vegetables in Australian gardens.⁶ The reader is given a sowing chart at the beginning of the booklet, followed by a monthly 'Dear boys and girls' letter and planting instructions in verse.

*Yates Junior Gardener*⁷ marks a shift in cover design, layout and content; it was likely to be aimed at older readers. The children shown on the cover perform the garden activities, replacing Uncle Koala. This is a practical guide about appropriate clothing to wear and tools to use while gardening. A warning about the poisonous bite of funnel-web spiders indicates a more cautionary approach than that of the earlier booklet. Instructions and illustrations are utilitarian.



Yates Junior Gardener, Sydney: Weldon Kids, 1993, cover, Children's Literature Collection, Ken Pound Collection, JKP 635 Y2T

Advertising is often considered ephemeral in nature, throwaway merchandise, or is viewed with the suspicion that product placement addresses an audience limited in its development of a critical perspective. Ken Pound considered that anything including advertising aimed at a child readership should form part of his collection to reflect the multifaceted nature of Australian childhood. But historical snapshots reveal that earlier in the 20th century such perceptions did not lessen the sales agenda of commercial organisations. More research into advertising for child readers could reveal why high-profile artists were used for product endorsement. A critical examination of the progression of social history trends and design would illuminate this aspect of Australian children's literary history.

"Gummut Villa,"
Acacia Street,
BUSHLAND.

1st April.

Dear Boys and Girls :

Phew ! It's quite a relief to say " Good-bye " to the hot weather, although we should not grumble, for the summer days are ideal for surfing, swimming, and so many other sports.

Many gardeners think that autumn is the best season of the year, for the ground is warm and plants grow very quickly, while the hot sun does not scorch them like it does in summer.

Now, children, you must not forget to keep the soil nice and loose, for it helps along the plants quite a lot. I am sure mother and father have been pleased with what you have done until now and want you to do even better. Of course you will have to make sure that you only sow Yates' seeds. You can always buy these near where you live.

As there are so many kinds of vegetable and flower seeds that can be sown now, I do not think I can do better than to give you a list of some of the better-known sorts so that you may choose the ones you like best.

With heaps of love until next month,

Uncle Koala

VEGETABLE SEEDS

Beans (Broad)
Beet
Cabbage (early varieties)
Carrot (early varieties)

Lettuce
Onions
Parsley
Parsnip

Peas
Radish
Spinach
Turnip

FLOWER SEEDS

Antirrhinum (Snapdragon)
Calendula (Broad-leaved
Marigold)
Calliopsis
Candytuft
Carnations
Centaurea
Chrysanthemum (Annual)
Clarkia
Delphinium

Dianthus
Gaillardia
Godetia
Gypsophila
Hollyhock
Larkspur
Lupins
Marigold (French)
Mignonette
Nasturtium

Nemesia
Pansies
Phlox
Poppies (all varieties)
Statice
Stocks
Sweet Peas
Viola
Wallflower (early flowering)

APRIL

In this little book you'll see
Handy lists for you and me
Kiddies dear, please don't forget,
Ask for Yates, the best you'll get.



Onions, you must have a plot.
Mother uses them a lot.
Brown and white are eas'ly grown
If the seeds from Yates are sown.

Help along the young Sweet Peas
So that they can climb with ease.
Netting or some garden sticks
Are the easiest things to fix.