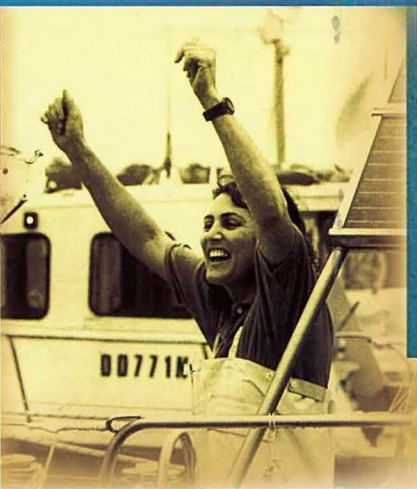
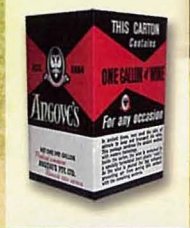
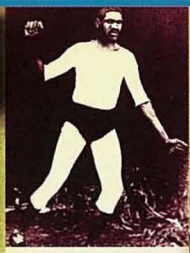


CHRYSTOPHER J. SPICER

GREAT AUSTRALIAN WORLD FIRSTS

THE THINGS WE MADE, THE THINGS WE DID



In 2002, Chrystopher J. Spicer became an Australian who was first when his acclaimed biography *Clark Gable* was published in the United States by McFarland to mark the centenary of Gable's birth. *Empire* film magazine observed that the biography had a 'meticulously researched and respectful approach'.

Spicer has been writing about Australian and American film and history for many years. He was a contributing editor of the former monthly Australian arts magazine *The Melburnian*, and has written for a number of magazines and newspapers in Australia and the United States. He was also a major contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), the first encyclopedia of an Australian city to be compiled in this country.

Spicer teaches writing at James Cook University in Queensland.

CHRYSTOPHER J. SPICER

GREAT
AUSTRALIAN
WORLD FIRSTS

THE THINGS WE MADE, THE THINGS WE DID



ALLEN & UNWIN
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

First published in 2012

Copyright © Chrystopher J. Spicer 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10 per cent of this book, whichever is the greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

Allen & Unwin
Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London
83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia

Phone: (612) 8425 0100
Fax: (612) 9906 2218
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com

Cataloguing-in-Publication details are available
from the National Library of Australia
www.trove.nla.gov.au

ISBN 978 1 74237 673 8

Cover images: top (clockwise from left): Jack Brabham, 1968; John Hoelscher and Lonnie Dupre, 2000; envelope signed by Jessie Keith Miller, 1929; painting of Vida Goldstein by Phyl Waterhouse, 1944 (NLA 2292721); bottom (clockwise from left): Sutton car (courtesy Chris Clemons); Charlie Samuels (courtesy Colin Tatz); Kay Cottee crossing finish line at Sydney Harbour, 1988 (© Newspix/Ian Mainsbridge); original Angove wine cask (courtesy John Angove).

Set in 12/16 pt Bembo by Midland Typesetters, Australia
Printed in China at Everbest Printing Co

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For Phil Pianta,
editor, friend and mentor*

'What man can imagine, man can do!'

Jules Verne

CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Part I: Arts	1
Waif Wander: Mary Fortune creates the detective before Sherlock Holmes	3
The wonderful, wonderful cat: Pat Sullivan and Felix	10
'I came to life wanting to paint': Nora Heysen, an artist of war and peace	19
Mad as hell and not going to take it any more: Peter Finch, actor	28
Part II: International Exploration	35
Aboriginal voyager: Bennelong (Woollarawarre), ambassador and international traveller	37
'I worshipped their beauty': Emmeline Freda Du Faur, mountaineer	47
'I felt liberated': Sir Hubert Wilkins, polar explorer and photographer	59
A tropical Queenslander on ice: John Hoelscher's circumnavigation of Greenland	78
'It's everyone's world': Kay Cottee and <i>Blackmores First Lady</i> circumnavigate the globe	90
Part III: Lifestyle	99
'One soweth; another reapeth': James Harrison and refrigeration	101
Australia's Edison: Henry Sutton	110

GREAT AUSTRALIAN WORLD FIRSTS

The opal man: Tullie C. Wollaston, the first to take Australian opals to the world	119
Sitting women: Vida Goldstein, Nellie Martel, Mary Ann Moore-Bentley and Selina Anderson	128
Go to work and do it: Eric Waterworth and the automatic record-changer	140
Chateau de Cardboard: Thomas W.C. Angove and the portable wine cask	148
The marlin and the pacemaker: Dr Mark C. Lidwill and his external cardiac pacemaker	155
Searching for her holy grail: Dr Fiona Wood and her quest for scarless healing	163
Part IV: Sport	171
Running black: Bobby McDonald and Charlie Samuels, Aboriginal sprinters	173
The perfect woman: Annette Kellerman, swimmer and movie star	181
The Cressy, the Lismore and the Red Seal: Alfred Alexander and his tennis racquets	192
The Guv'nor: Jack Brabham and his BT19 Formula One car	200
The track ahead: Geoff Healey and the RaceCam	210
The £10 bet: Michael O'Brien and the sporting streak	216
Part V: Transport	225
The missile and the monorail: Louis Brennan and his life of invention	227
Her skill and art are wondrous rare: Florence Mary Taylor, glider pilot, architect and town planner	241
'Theory is the captain, practice the soldiers': Anthony George Michell, Australia's James Watt	252
Tanked: Lancelot de Mole and his tracked vehicle	262
Wired for sound: William T. Kelly, the Summit car and the first factory-installed car radio	271
Aviatrix: Jessie Miller, Australia's first long-distance airwoman	280
Sailing the sea road: The <i>Empress of Australia</i>	296
Acknowledgements	305
Bibliography	309
Index	315

INTRODUCTION

Australians are so proud of the tradition that no one should do better than another within our culture that we've given a name to the practice of cutting down achievers: 'the tall-poppy syndrome'. We've assimilated this national harvest that reduces everyone to an equal shortness so thoroughly that it's become one of our great cultural excuses. As a nation, we have become so smug and self-satisfied in our lucky country that we would rather everyone lose equally than any individual win. We insist that students must not fail in the classroom because competition is too psychologically damaging, and then we decry the country's lack of business and political leaders when such leaders are forged in the heat of the race to win and honed by the cut and thrust of competition.

Unfortunately for our culture, reducing everyone to the same size in Australia hasn't meant raising everyone up to the same level; instead, traditionally the practice has been to cut everyone *down* to the lowest common denominator. Rather than stretch some student minds, for example, the entire class has to be taught at the pace of the slowest. Although Australia hasn't gone down the extreme paths of other countries that wanted everyone equal and so imprisoned their educators, scientists, talented artists and writers, it transports them instead to a cultural wasteland of inadequate funding, lack of interest

GREAT AUSTRALIAN WORLD FIRSTS

and course cut-backs. Then we wonder why our children know nothing about their own country, let alone about reading and writing. We're far too civilised to sentence significant Australians to a gulag somewhere near Woomera, but every day we do something far worse and more lasting: we exile them from our collective national memory.

Australia as a country has a short cultural memory except when it comes to footballers and cricket scores. You don't think so? Alright then, shut your laptop and put away your mobile phone and answer from memory these three questions about Australians: Who was the first person to explore Antarctica from the air? Who was the first woman to circumnavigate the globe in a yacht non-stop and unassisted? Who was the first person to be awarded an Oscar for Best Actor after he died? If you answered all those questions correctly, you belong to a tiny and exclusive group of Australians. If you didn't, I can only point out that those are all twentieth-century people and rest my case. You see, we are all too ready to adopt Australian symbols, usually because television advertising tells us they're Australian, but we are too quick to forget the people.

Yet it is in the remembering of those people that we hold the history that defines our nation. Without it, we have no collective sense of who we are as Australian people. Those we remember as important in our history convey to us in the present our sense of identity, our sense of self. In remembering them, we honour not only their achievements but their values and their aspirations. By repeating their stories, we are conveying to the present generation the idea that these achievements, aspirations and values are important in the development of this country. In a way, we storytellers are carrying on the tradition of the classic bards and reciters of odes who have perpetuated since ancient times the memory of legendary heroes who set out into the unknown, met challenges head on, defeated their dragons and returned home victorious.

Australia has its own legendary heroes from many walks of life, not just cricket pitches, football fields or iron man competitions, and a select few have been the first in the world to achieve in their field.

INTRODUCTION

That's right—Australians have actually been the first in the world to fly distances, to explore the unknown, to build dreams like monorails and racing cars and television, to save lives with pacemakers and healing methods, to write books and to climb mountains. It is the tall poppies who, in the end, live on in our history and yet who have so often been denied recognition for their achievements within their own country.

This book contains just a few of their stories. This is by no means a definitive list; there are many more stories still to be told. No selection criteria were imposed for this particular group other than an attempt to be representative, that a first achievement was involved and that many of these people are largely unknown. I do realise that 'first' is often a qualitative term that is by no means definitive, and so I have often modified the term as 'first known' or 'first recorded' and I would always consider that is how the term should be considered. In the case of some inventive progressions, it can actually be quite difficult to say who was first, as many inventions rely on the preceding work of others and different patents are awarded in different countries. So I anticipate that some of these firsts may be a little controversial, but if that leads to discussion about aspects of our heritage, then it can only be good. To help with that discussion, I have added a section at the end of many stories to give the reader an idea of where this 'first' fits into the broader picture of development in that field.

Above all, I hope that this book encourages readers to learn more about people who are an integral part of Australia's cultural heritage, such as those featured here. Once you have finished reading it, I also hope that you will become involved in preserving and developing Australia's culture by passing these stories on to a younger generation who may thus be inspired to go into the future and achieve their own firsts. Let us change this country by growing more tall poppies rather than cutting them down.

Chrystopher J. Spicer
Cairns, Queensland, May 2012