

Anthony Trollope – the ‘World’s First Celebrity’

Famous English novelist visited Australia and New Zealand in the 1870s and later published a book on his odyssey, described by the London Times newspaper as the best account of this part of the world. He may be regarded as the world’s first celebrity. Trollope visited Sandhurst (Bendigo) during this time and made some harsh judgments on the city. Amongst these were:

‘As a city, it was neither handsome nor commodious. It had the appearance of having been scratched up violently out of the body of the earth by the rake of some infernal deity, who had left everything behind him dirty, uncouth, barren and disorderly’. Sandhurst was ‘repulsive’. Everything was ‘crowded, unfinished and uncomfortable’.

He did venture down the shaft of the Great Extended Hustlers mine and ‘was received with the greatest courtesy.’ However, he saw ‘nothing that was worth seeing’ and he understood nothing that was told to him.

Naturally, these remarks did not go well with Bendigonians, especially as the 1870s were a time of a great mining boom which saw Bendigo become as well known as London or New York. An editorial in the Bendigo Advertiser of 9 April 1873, headed ‘Writing in the Dark’, lambasted Trollope in the following way: ‘Does Mr Trollope know, we wonder, if we continued to produce wool only and no gold, there would have been no such attractive city in the colony as Ballarat, nor even one as repulsive as Sandhurst.’

A note for your diary: Readers may learn more of Trollope’s visit to Bendigo by coming to a talk by Dr Nigel Starck on Friday 6 October in the Bendigo TAFE Theatre at 2 pm.

Image: Cover of Nigel Starck’s book, ‘Anthony Trollope, the First Celebrity.’