The story of Australia: 
CHANGE AND CONSTANCY

Throughout the whole last year, Bridge focused on Australia, its nature and culture. One thing that wasn’t covered in depth was Australian history. So let’s have a closer look at it now. In the May-June issue, you can then look forward to learning more about Australian literature.

Australia is an ancient land as well as a relatively young country. Aboriginals have inhabited the continent for about 40,000 years, though the country as most recognise it today started to take shape a little over 200 years ago. Since then, waves of immigrants from Britain, Europe and Asia have continued to shape Australian society.

ABORIGINAL COUNTRY
Aboriginal people arrived via a ‘landbridge’ from Asia during the Ice Age when the sea levels were much lower. Generally, they lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. However, it would be wrong to think that Australian Aboriginals were a single culture. They were and remain a diverse people, with many languages, social systems, artistic styles, traditional stories and spiritual beliefs. Because of the oral nature of these societies, we have few records of their long history.

PENAL SETTLEMENT
The lives of Aboriginal people changed dramatically with the arrival of Europeans. The Dutch are considered to be the first Europeans to make contact with Australia. However, they didn’t establish any colonies. The first European colony was set up by the British in 1788. It was intended to be a penal settlement – prisoners from England, known as convicts, were sent to Australia as punishment.

Life in the early colony was harsh. Unlike the Aboriginal people, who had an intimate understanding of the Australian natural world, the British arrived with their old views in a new land. They wanted to plant European crops and even wanted to follow the European natural cycle. Unfortunately, the seasons in Australia are reversed. Plus, Australia receives much less rainfall than Europe. The first settlers almost died of starvation. Over time and through trial and error the settlers found the crops, like wheat, and animals, like sheep, which could prosper. But the lives of the convicts were still brutal. Living conditions were poor and corporal punishment was a common fact of life.

GROWTH OF THE COLONIES
Slowly more colonies were established. Transportation of convicts began to slow down and stopped entirely by the 1860s as more free settlers, who had come to Australia attracted by very cheap land, opposed the practice. In 1835, Melbourne was established not as a prison but as a village. By the 1880s, this ‘village’ grew to become the second largest city in the whole British Empire.

The growth of Melbourne, along with other cities, was spurred by the gold rush of the second half of the nineteenth century. Up to 2% of the British population emigrated to Australia during this period. People also came from North America and China. Such an influx of people changed the situation in Australia. The people demanded certain rights, including a free press, trial by jury and greater representation. It was during this time that the Australian political institutions started to take shape. Moreover, many adults at that time were actually Australian born. To them, Australia was ‘the Mother Country’. This growing national consciousness was reflected in the growing demands for a federation and even a republic.

The Aboriginal reaction to the new colonies was understandably hostile. The two groups were in competition.
for resources and land. Many Australian cities were established in places where Aboriginal communities were densest because there was enough water. Clashes were common, with casualties on both sides, more of them among Aboriginals. Even more devastating than guns were the diseases unintentionally brought by the settlers. Many Aboriginal people died of diseases such as small pox, chicken pox, the flu and measles. In 1901, when Australian federation was declared, the Aboriginal population was 10% of what it had been at the time of the first European settlement.

FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Federated Australia remained a part of the British Empire and for much of the first half of the twentieth century kept very strong ties with Britain. It had a discriminatory immigration policy called the White Australia Policy, which limited the number of non-Europeans, especially non-British, who could enter. These restrictions were not officially lifted until 1973. Australia also maintained very close foreign policy relations with Britain. In 1914, it entered the First World War as a member of the British Empire. Australians also fought in the Second World War. When Japan entered into the war, battles were fought in nearby Papua New Guinea and some of Australia’s northern cities were bombed.

POST-WAR PROSPERITY

Despite these attacks, Australia was relatively unscared compared to many other countries. For this reason, it was an attractive place for families to relocate after the war. The Australian government encouraged people to settle there, assisting them with travel and finding them work. This was the second great influx of immigrants. They changed the population into a much more mixed one; other languages were starting to be spoken in Australia and this diversity has become a permanent part of the Australian society. In fact, 43% of Australians today were the immigrants from this period.

The post-war period was also a time when the rights of Aboriginals improved. By 1965, they were granted full voting rights. But Aboriginals also demanded the recognition of past ownership. This wish was finally achieved when the famous Mabo case in 1992 officially acknowledged the continuous ownership of Aboriginal land.

The Australian Republican movement didn’t completely disappear. In November 1999, Republicans hoped to sever all ties with Britain when a referendum was held to change the constitution to introduce a parliamentary appointed president. But the Republicans lost in all states and the British monarch remained the official head of state.

AUSTRALIA TODAY

At the turn of the millennium, Australia was increasingly more prosperous but conservative. Unemployment was low and living standards were high, but the open cosmopolitan nature of Australia seemed in decline. Many Australians wanted a more restrictive immigration policy and felt that they had moved away too much from their British roots.

Then in 2007, Australia made another turn and elected a prime minister who is among other things fluent in Mandarin Chinese. Perhaps all this goes to show is that the one constant in Australian history is change.

Ryan Scott (Australia)

VOCABULARY

to take shape - utvářet se
via [via] - přes
Ice Age - doba ledová
diverse [dai[və]s, ’daivəs] - rozmanitý
artistic [’aːstɪstɪk] - umělecký
few records of - velice málo dokladů o
penal settlement [’piːznə’slɛnt] - trestanecké osídlení
to set up - založit
unlike [’ʌnlɪk] - na rozdíl od
intimate understanding [’ɪntɪmtɪst] - dlouhé porozumění
crops [kroʊps] - (zemědělské) plodiny
are reversed [’ɛvrəʊst] - jsou opačně
settler [’setlə] - osadník
starvation [’stɑːrvəʃ(ə)n] - náhradního
through trial and error [tra’zɔl] - metodou pokusu a omylu
wheat [’wiːt] - plenice
corporal punishment [’kɔrprəl’pʌnɪʃmənt] - tělesné tresty
entirely [’entɪri] - úplně
opposed the practice [’ɒspəd] - byli proti
blames [’beɪmz] - zpovědné
to spur [spɔːr] - podnít
reckless [’rɛkləs] - velmi málo dokladů o
gold rush - žlutá horečka
influx [’ɪnflʌks] - příliv, příliv
free press - svoboda tisku
trial by jury [’trɪəl ’dʒʊrɪ] - soudní proces před porotou
greater representation [’ɡreɪtər ’reprɪzen’tɛnt] - lepší (politické)
zastoupení
national consciousness [’næʃə’næl] - národní cítění
federation [’fɛdərəʃ(ə)n] - federace
understandably hostile [’ʌndəsti’dɔːbli ’hɔstɪl] - z pochopitelných důvodů nepřátelské
to be in competition - soupeřit
dense [dɛns] - hustý
clash [klaʃ] - střet
unintentionally [’ʌnɪntə’snɛn’tælɪ] - neúmyslně

small pox - neštovice
chicken pox - plané neštovice
measles [’miːsəlz] - spanišťky
ties [taɪz] - vazby
restriction [’rɪstrɪkʃ(ə)n] - omezení
unscared [’ʌn’skɔrəd] - nepoznamenaný
compared to [’kɔmpərəd tə] - ve srovnání s
to relocate [’rɪlocət] - přesídlit
diversity [’daɪvərsi] - rozmanitost, různorodost
full voting rights - plné volbě
oral natural - mluvené
recognition of past ownership [’rɪkə’naʃən 0v ’pɑːst ’əʊnsəʊənt] - uznání bývalého vlastnictví
continuous [’kən’tɪnjʊəs] - nepřetržitý
sever [ˈsɛvər] - zpřetrhat
constitution [’kɒnsɛtʃ(ə)n] - ústava
dermatologically [’dɛmətɔ’lɔgɪkə] - podnítí
relocated [’rɪləʊked] - přesídlit
in decline [’ɪn dɪ’klaɪn] - na ústupu
constant [’kɒnsɛnt] - konstanta

GLOSSARY

landbridge - a strip of land which allows animals or people to cross and colonise new lands
hunter-gatherer lifestyle - they hunted for animals and gathered plants and berries to eat
oral natural - stories and culture were passed down from generation to generation in a spoken way, without being written down
mother country - the country where you were born

LANGUAGE POINT

The verb “to lift” usually means to move something from a lower to a higher position. (Please, help me lift this armchair, it is heavy. She lifted her eyes from the book she was reading.) But it can also mean to end a rule or law. (These restrictions were not officially lifted until 1973.)