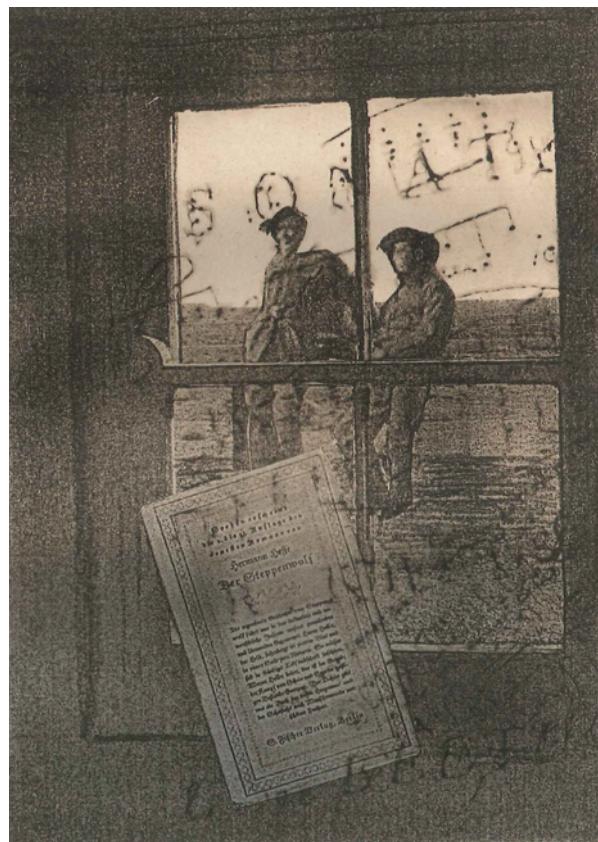


# HMT Dunera and Hay

A series of etchings by

Alex Byrne AM



Exhibition at Hay Shire Library  
September – October 2018

# The Dunera Story

The story of the ‘Dunera Boys’ links the horrors of the rise of the Nazi Party and the Holocaust to Hay in the Australian Riverina during the Second World War and to modern, multicultural Australia.

As the Nazis tightened their grip on Germany and intensified their measures against Jews, Rom (Gypsies), homosexuals and other ‘undesirables’, those who could sought refuge in other countries. The need to assist their escape intensified after Kristallnacht, the violent anti-Jewish pogroms in November 1938. Most dramatic was the rescue of 10,000 children by the Kindertransport.

When the Second World War was declared, the refugees who had settled in Britain were classified as ‘Enemy Aliens’ but relegated to a lower category. Following the loss of France and the occupation of most of western Europe, the British authorities succumbed to public panic and decided that adult male enemy aliens should be removed with three shiploads destined for Canada and one for Australia. One, the Arandora Star, was torpedoed in the Atlantic with 805 drowned.

HMT Dunera was a troopship that had taken New Zealand soldiers to the Middle East. Assigned to the task of removing enemy aliens, the Dunera took 2,542 detainees at Liverpool on 10 July 1940. They included some rescued from the Arandora Star and predominantly consisted of Jewish refugees among the 2,036 anti-Nazis along with some 500 Italian and German prisoners of war and Nazi sympathisers. Together with the ship’s crew, 309 British guards and seven officers, the total was almost twice the Dunera’s troop carrier capacity of 1,600.

It was a hellish 57 day voyage made under the risk of enemy attack, including two torpedo attacks. Severely overcrowded and sailing through the tropics, most internees were kept below decks throughout the voyage, except for daily 10-minute periods of exercise on deck under heavy guard. Latrines overflowed, water was rationed and no changes of clothing were allowed.

The guards, some of whom had been released from prison to help in the war effort, were brutal. Internees were frequently abused, beaten, and robbed by the guards who rifled their possessions, stealing their few reminders of family and home and throwing their cases into the Indian Ocean. Even sergeants gave beatings and a guard was said to have smashed beer bottles on the deck so that the internees would have to exercise barefoot on the shards.

Arriving in Melbourne, 344 internees disembarked and were taken to Tatura; the remainder continued to Sydney from where they were transported 750 kilometres by train to the Hay. Their treatment was completely different: they were given food and fruit and the Australian soldiers guarding them offered cigarettes. Arrival at the siding in Hay was a shock as the accommodation wasn’t ready and the flat plain was stark. But the guards were kindly. There is a story of a soldier asking one of the internees to hold his rifle while he lit his cigarette.

Intense criticism of the deportation and incarceration in Britain and Australia resulted in the British Government expressing regret for the incident as early as October 1940. Charges were laid against three of the Dunera guards including their commander, and compensation payments were allocated to the deportees. Despite bureaucratic delays, the internees were all eventually released. Some 900 elected to remain in Australia, a substantial number serving with the Australian defence forces. Almost all of the remainder made their way back to Britain, many joining the forces.

# The Dunera Boys

Dubbed ‘The Dunera Boys’, the internees included many talented individuals who contributed to the lively cultural educational life of the camp at Hay. After the war, many made major contributions in many fields both in Europe and Australia, helping to develop the more vibrant and multicultural society that developed in Australia after the Second World War.

While interned in Hay camp, the internees established a ‘university’, libraries and orchestras. They held concerts and theatre performances, published a newspaper and even minted a ‘Hay currency’ for use inside the camp.

The Dunera Boys who stayed on in Australia made huge contributions to the cultural, academic and economic life of the country. Among them were men who went on to become nationally and internationally recognised, including:

- ◆ artists Ludwig Hirshfield Mack and Heinz Henghes
- ◆ athletic coach Franz Stampfl – who coached the four-minute-mile runner Roger Bannister
- ◆ composers Felix Werder and his father Boaz Bischofswerder
- ◆ economist Fred Gruen
- ◆ engineer Paul Eisenklam
- ◆ furniture designers Fred Lowen and Ernst Rodeck
- ◆ philosophers Kurt Baier and Gerd Buchdahl
- ◆ photographers Hans Axel and Henry Talbot
- ◆ theoretical physicist Hans Buchdahl

## References

P Bartrop and G Eisen, *The Dunera Affair: A documentary resource book*, The Jewish Museum of Australia and Schwartz and Wilkinson, Victoria, 1990.

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1941 Dunera Boys Hay Internment Camp Collection, Migration Heritage Centre, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime/dunera/index.html>, accessed 1 June 2018.

HMT Dunera, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMT\\_Dunera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMT_Dunera), accessed 1 June 2018.

*The Dunera Boys* [video recording, two episodes] directed by Bob Lewin, Australia, Jethro Films, 1985.

# The Etchings

Alex Byrne's etchings were created in 2011 and were inspired by this tremendous story which extends from the hatred and cruelty of Nazism to the development of modern Australia. The etchings tell the story in seven phases:

1. Kristallnacht
2. Kindertransport
3. Indian Ocean
4. Hay Siding
5. Hay Plains
6. The Bridge
7. Future

Other prints included in the exhibition are:

Je suis Charlie	2015
Mary Poppins	2011
Spangled Drongo	2011
Willy Wagtail	2011
Dancer	2011
Daddy wouldn't	2011

## Kristallnacht

On the night of 9 November 1938 and during the following day, German Nazis attacked Jewish persons and property. Telephone orders from Munich triggered pogroms throughout Germany, which then included Austria. Rioters burned or damaged more than 1,000 synagogues and ransacked and looted about 7,500 Jewish businesses, killed at least 91 Jews, and vandalised Jewish hospitals, homes, schools, and cemeteries. The attackers were often neighbours. Some 30,000 Jewish males aged 16 to 60 were arrested. To accommodate so many new prisoners, the concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen were expanded. After the pogrom ended, it was called Kristallnacht meaning “crystal night” or “night of broken glass.” This name symbolised the final shattering of Jewish existence in Germany.

- Adapted from Michael Berenbaum, ‘Kristallnacht’, Encylcopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kristallnacht>, accessed 1 June 2018.



## Kindertransport

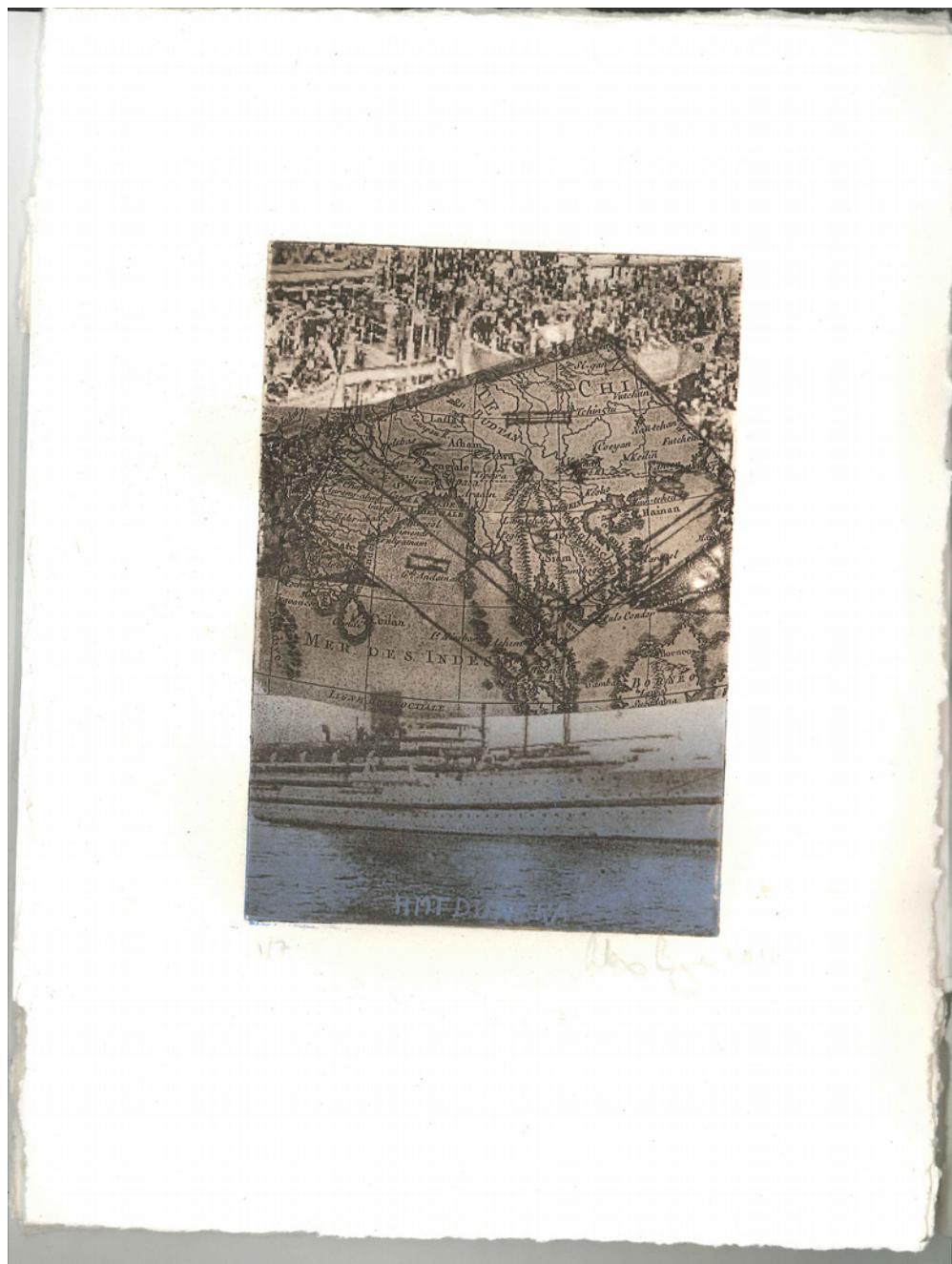
Following the destruction and internments of Kristallnacht, a nine-month rescue effort was authorised by the British government and conducted by individuals in various countries and by assorted religious and secular groups that saved some 10,000 children, under age 17 and mostly Jewish, from Nazi Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Danzig by transporting them by train and ship to the United Kingdom. Called the Kindertransport ('Children Transport'), the initiative demonstrated the compassion of those who challenged international indifference to the developing horror which ultimately claimed the lives of 6 million Jews. The etching shows the importance of these escapes and the confusion and fear of those rescued.

- Adapted from Melissa Hacker & Ernest Goodman, 'Kindertransport', Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kindertransport>, accessed 1 June 2018.
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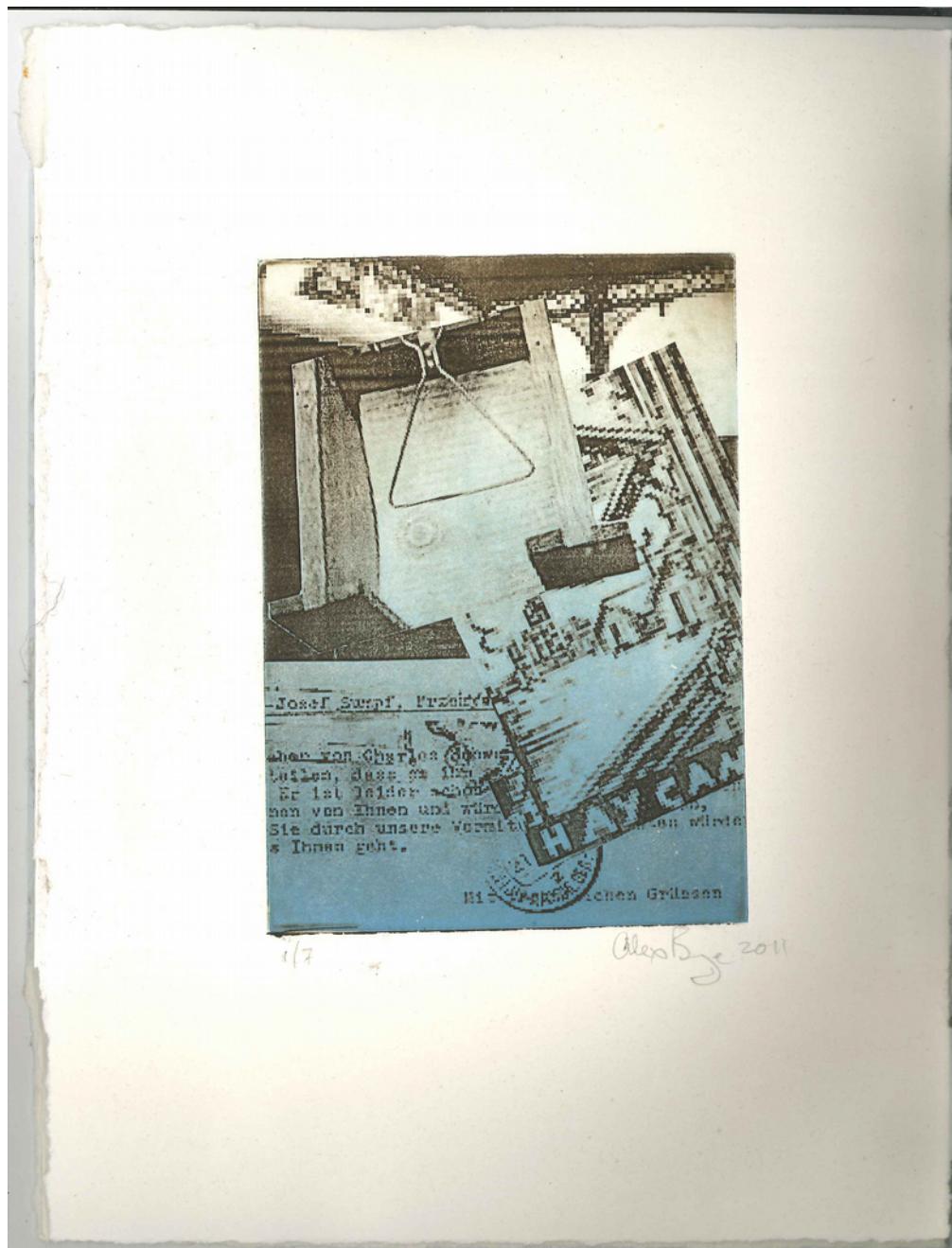
## Indian Ocean

While crossing the Indian Ocean from South Africa to Australia, the undisciplined and brutal guards attacked and abused the detainees. Although their baggage was supposed to be locked away in the hold, their meagre possessions – which included the few precious items brought from their homes in occupied Europe – were pilfered. The etching shows the Dunera, a photograph of the crowded conditions on board, the Indian Ocean and one of the cheap suitcases that were broken open and thrown overboard, discarding precious memories.



## Hay Siding

Drawing on images from the camp and an internee's German record card, this etching depicts the siding at the Hay Railway Station at which the internees arrived to see their new home, so different to those they had left behind in Britain and in Berlin, Vienna, Prague and ...



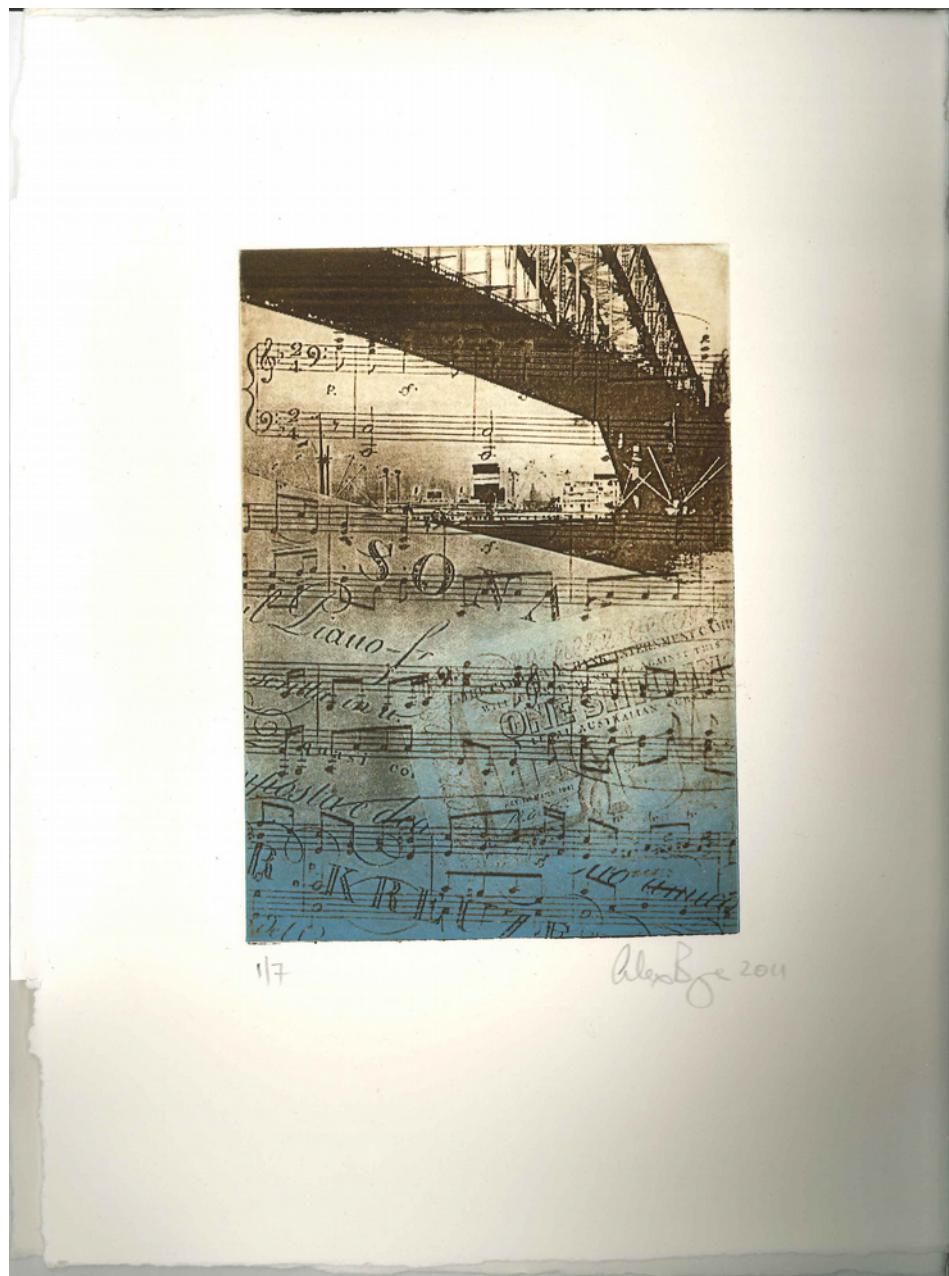
## Hay Plains

Fond memories of decent treatment by the Australian Army guards and the opportunities to share knowledge, make music, present theatre ... were recalled by the internees at Hay. The relaxed guards in this etching show that the respect was mutual but the refugees remained interned until officialdom finally realised that they were opposed to Nazism and fascism and had been treated deplorably.



## The Bridge

Finally released from internment, the refugees were able to return to Britain, especially those with families, or to choose to remain in Australia. Many who remained joined the war effort although they were restricted to enlistment in non combatant forces. Nevertheless they welcomed freedom after their long and unjustified detention.



## Future

Engineers, musicians, artists and scholars, very many of the Dunera Boys made influential contributions to scholarship, culture, architecture and many other fields after the Second World War. Those who stayed in Australia helped to create modern post war Australia with its growing industrial base, expanding universities, more daring artistic ferment and developing multicultural population, fuelled by the mass migration program initiated in 1949. The etching depicts Blues Point Tower designed by Harry Seidler. The eminent Australian architect escaped from Austria after the Anschluss and was then interned and transported to Canada, fortunately missing the horrors of the Dunera. But, like so many of the Dunera Boys, his achievements were enormous.



## The Artist

Alex Byrne has many years experience as a printmaker and has more recently focussed on creating artists' books. He has exhibited in a number of group exhibitions and in a solo exhibition, 'Heart', at Gaffa Gallery in Sydney in 2016. His works are in a number of private and public collections.

In his professional life, Dr Alex Byrne FALIA AM ChevOAL retired as State Librarian of New South Wales in 2016 following an extensive career in senior library and university management. He was the President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions as well as leading many Australian library and information organisations. Among his 400 publications are many dealing with human rights and Indigenous issues relating to libraries and information services. Alex was awarded Member of the Order of Australia (AM) "for significant service to library and information management through initiatives to develop access to global and Indigenous resources" in the 2018 Queen's Birthday Honours.

## Availability

When framed the etchings are 410 mm high x 320 mm wide and are available for sale at \$200 each or \$300 framed plus GST and postage. Contact Alex Byrne via email [jalex.byrne@gmail.com](mailto:jalex.byrne@gmail.com).