‘Pictures of Travel”: The Journeys and Diaries of pedestrian excursionist William Mogford Hamlet

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Abstract

When he retired as NSW Government Analyst in 1915 the Sun newspaper described William Mogford Hamlet as ‘one of the world’s most enthusiastic walkers.’ Before migrating to Australia in 1884 Hamlet had walked along the coasts of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cornwall, from Norfolk to Cambridge and Oxford, through the Western Highlands of Scotland and in the tropical jungles of Surinam. In Australia Hamlet continued his love of walking, enjoying day and overnight excursions, as well as long-distance walking tours, including two excursions from Brisbane to Sydney and one from Sydney to Melbourne. Hamlet liked to write just as much as he liked to walk and accounts of three of his Australian walking tours were published in the Sydney Morning Herald under the title ‘Pictures of Travel’. Alongside a description of the route, a panoramic sketch of the scenery encountered and affectionate portraits of the people he met along the way, Hamlet’s articles contain romantic observations on both the history and progress of rural Australia. This paper will examine Hamlet as both tourist walker and travel writer, analyzing the way his pedestrian travels served as a point of negotiation between his British past and his Australian present. Firmly rooted within the tradition of the European walking tour Hamlet saw his articles as an attempt to carve for himself a place in the genre of romantic walking literature. At the same time his walking and his writing became a means through which he developed a sense of national identification with his adopted home and made a crucial contribution to the development of bushwalking as a distinctively Australian leisure pursuit.