

Rose Stereograph Company: One of Australia's most significant historical photo collections go to auction



By Mike Dalton • Reporter | 9:28pm Jun 21, 2021



Thousands of old photos found in spare bedroom



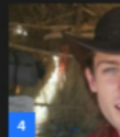
Thousands of old photos found in spare bedroom



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If you've ever sent a postcard in Australia - before Instagram demanded that you tell people immediately how relaxed and tanned you are - there's a strong chance it was made by the Rose Stereograph Company.

Founded in 1880, the company would only close down last year.

Now more than 110,000 images that were taken by the company's battalion of photographers over 140 years are up for auction.

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More than 110,000 images that were taken by the company's battalion of photographers over 140 years are up for auction. (Nine)

As per their name, the initial focus for the Rose Stereograph Company was to supply the dual pictures that would be placed into what was called a stereoscope, that would

provide a simulated 3D effect.

It was high tech in 1880, when the photograph itself was still new.

But it wasn't long before the silver screen would start garnering paying customers at the expense of the stereoscope, and the company changed tack, moving into the postcard business.

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The newly instituted industrial rights such as an 8-hour day and holidays, now allowed the average worker the chance to get away, and to brag of it via the new postal service. That needed pictures.



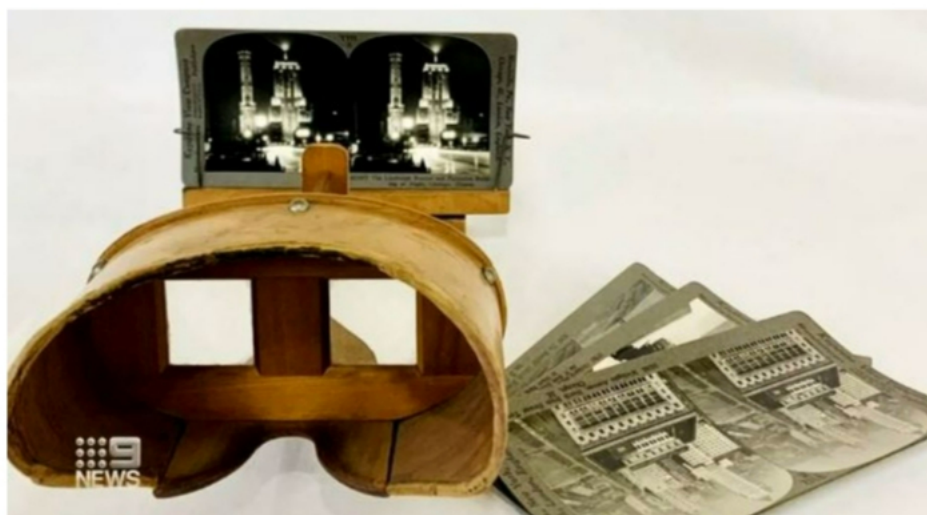
The armour of the Kelly gang laid out on a lawn as Dan and Ned Kelly faced trial. (Nine)

And for almost a century and a half since, the snappers of the Rose Stereograph Company have been shooting pics and in turn building an archive, that taps into the critical moments, motifs and horizons in Australia's colonial history.

"It's a collection that spans 140 years, 5 generations of families," says Amanda Benson, Head of Fina Arts and Antiquities with Lloyds Auctions.

"It captures some of the most historically significant events in our time. Their entire business was to create images of places, people, things, and events."

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The initial focus for the Rose Stereograph Company was to supply the dual pictures that would be placed into what was called a stereoscope, that would provide a simulated 3D effect. (Nine)

Of the over one-hundred thousand pieces, more than 7000 are glass negatives, a technology that still beats the modern digital world today.

"We don't have a technology still, that actually outpaces the sheer clarity of image, that was able to be captured by the glass plate negatives," says Amanda.

She gestures to one plate holding a crowded beach scene from Coogee in 1910,

"This could be blown up the size of the Opera House, and not lose any of its resolution. Every time you look closer, you walk further and further into the past."

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The collection features some of the greatest sights ever seen by human eyes. (Nine)

Two of the plates hold true iconic moments of Australiana. One is of the armour of the Kelly gang, laid out on a lawn as Dan and Ned Kelly faced the beak.

"Out the front of the courthouse, while they were being trialled in 1880 at Beechworth" adds Amanda.

The other is Anzac Cove, on the morning of Sunday the 25th of April, as Australian troops came ashore for the ill-fated campaign.

"They had probably the biggest network of photographers in Australia," says Amanda. "Even in war zones."

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The collection is so voluminous, that it is being auctioned over the course of 8 days.

A sad irony being that it would be COVID, plus Instagram, that would finally kill off the Rose Stereograph Company.

Amanda adds in closing, "this collection is without question, the most significant historical collection I've ever seen."