

Kimberley Society



Book Note

Pearls and Pearling Life by Edwin W Streeter. Facsimile, jointly published by [Hesperian Press](#), (Carlisle, WA) and Matching Press (Essex, UK), 2007. Hard cover, 340 pages, ISBN 0951 8 664 2 7, RRP \$116.

This facsimile of a pearling classic, originally published in 1886 by George Bell and Sons of London, will grace any bookshelf. With original copies having long been scarce, the facsimile will appeal to scholars and book collectors as well as providing fascinating reading for anyone interested in the history of pearls. Its plates (colour as well as black and white) are very attractive, and a fold-out map shows the principal pearling regions in northern Australia, New Guinea and the Asian islands.

The book covers pearls and pearling regions throughout the world, and the author (the founder of the Streeter & Male businesses in Broome) devotes four chapters to Australia. Chapter VIII offers an overview of the north-west Australian pearl shell fishing industry which, although operating mostly out of Cossack, extended to waters off the Kimberley coast. It describes the men involved in the industry, the prevailing practices, the impact of cyclones and other bad weather, the recruitment of Aboriginal divers (who worked as shepherds and shearers in the off-season), and the failure of the Australian Fishery Company (floated in London in 1872). Chapter IX is devoted to Torres Strait fisheries, Chapter X to Streeter's 1883 pearling activities, and Chapter XVII to the famous, or perhaps infamous, Southern Cross pearl.

Also of interest is that the Matching Press published Patrick Streeter's biography of Edwin William Streeter in 1993. In that book, *Streeter of Bond Street*, Chapter 4 discusses the Streeter family's involvement in the north-west Australian pearling industry between 1883 and 1911.

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