

# The Sharps Shooter

Christmas 2023

## Remembering Shane MacGowan

**Phrenology**

Guilt by head shape

**What The f\*\*\*  
Is Wrong With  
Conservatives**

**The Muppets take  
on opioids**

**Psychedelic  
Santa**

# DECEMBER 2023



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Disclaimer: The articles in The Sharps Shooter are sourced from multiple sites. The wording in these articles does not necessarily reflect our beliefs. No offence is intended.

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# Welcome

*To the Christmas 23 issue of  
The Sharps Shooter Magazine*

Welcome Reductioneers, to The Sharps Shooter.

I've got to start with the terrible, and surprising news about singer, songwriter, poet, Shane MacGowan.

Surprising, given his life, that he lasted this long, and surprising, given he lasted this long, that he wouldn't last forever. I'm truly sad about his passing.

Like thousands of other Irish folk and hundreds of thousands before and after me, I first moved to London as a teen in the 1980s. We did the drinking, the building sites. We worked down on tube lines, we cashed Giros (dole cheques), and pooled money for booze. We often made the choice between buying food or buying booze, and woke up hungover and hungry, and all to the music of The Pogues. Our lives were like the lyrics of a Pogues song.

I don't think there was ever a songwriter that got what it was like being an Irish immigrant in London, especially in those days, quite like Shane MacGowan.

I'm not even sure emigrating now is the same as it was in the 80s, 70s, 60s and on back into the 19th century. No doubt times can be just as tough, but not the same. The world is different now than it was before the 21st century; times change. There's a saying "the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there."

This issue we pay tribute to Shane and all he meant to so many. But it's not just about our lost friend. We have much more for you to read, and hopefully it will give you something to think about how Sesame Street is helping children understand parental drug dependence, particularly opioids.

It's shocking to think that in you include the number of Americans that are expected to die from drug overdose this year, there has been almost the same number of American overdose deaths since the year 2001, as American military personnel deaths in war since they first became a nation in 1775. Military personnel killed in warfare since 1775: 1,185,596. Overdose deaths since 2001: 1,177,020.

We look at the utter nonsense that was Phrenology, and get festive by looking at how psychedelic drugs helped create our image of Christmas, and of course, another rant from Padadoz Mahone.

**Safe holidays.**

The editor



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# THE MUPPETS TAKE ON OPIOIDS

Elmo and Karli discuss how Karli's mother is in recovery for an unspecified addiction.

Many children experience confusion and anxiety when their parents are dependent on opioids. Sesame Workshop, the non-profit behind the renowned children's show Sesame Street, aims to enhance kids' understanding of addiction in families, fostering emotional resilience for the present and future.

Ruth Paris, an associate professor specializing in early childhood trauma, emphasizes the traumatic impact of a parent's opioid use disorder on children. Early intervention is crucial to mitigate the effects on cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Sesame Workshop, with a grant from the Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts, plans to create more videos, stories, and resources focused on addiction, treatment, and healing. These materials, featuring Muppets like Karli and Elmo, provide tools for parents, caregivers, social workers, and therapists to navigate conversations about addiction with children aged 1 to 6.



The resources include coloring books, short videos, and storybooks addressing emotions surrounding addiction. Karli, a Muppet with a parent in addiction treatment, personifies the challenges children face.

In the past, Sesame Workshop tackled difficult issues like death and grief. The new materials on addiction will be part of Sesame Workshop's "[How to Talk to Kids about Tough Topics](#)" online resource library.



Rum, Sodomy  
& the Lash. 1985



## REMEMBERING SHANE MACGOWAN

By Will Stenberg.

I woke up in the early morning to the news about Shane, and immediately thought, for some reason, about the way he spoke of his childhood years in Tipperary, where his extended family lived in a small cottage without running water that doubled as an IRA safe house.

Here in rural Ireland young Shane lived in an atmosphere of myth and magic, faerie and saints, rosaries and revolution, beer and whiskey, profanity, prayers and intense familial love.

### *Another crazy Paddy who would slip between the cracks*

He was drinking beer, betting on horses, and praying to the angels and saints at five years old - that is when he wasn't romping around in the muddy fields or the deep green woods. He spoke of these times with an aching, tender longing. When he won a literary scholarship and left to live permanently in England, the sense of dislocation was intense.

To hear him tell, it was as though he had left a tribal society with deep roots and traditions to be thrust into an alien, industrial hell, faceless and without love.

Then of course there was the explicit anti-Irish racism of the time. The end result was a total breakdown, institutionalization, tranquilizers and electric shock therapy.

## Shane was a literary genius

I guess they might have thought he was just another crazy Paddy who would slip between the cracks and never be heard from again. They were wrong and what rose up would spit in their faces and overtake them with its ferocious and unyielding beauty.

The Pogues were his answer to this dislocation, a cry of rage and pride, an assertion of worth and a visionary mission. By taking Irish music into the nascent punk movement, he was both a preservationist and a radical innovator.

But it wouldn't have meant so much without his songwriting. At one point there was a website that annotated his lyrics, so rife are they with allusions to Lorca and Genet, Irish revolutionary politics and ancient Celtic myth, pop culture, history and geography.

Shane was a literary genius, and those who paid attention knew. But most of all his songs had heart, and a longing - a longing in the deep heart's core. I feel perhaps it was a longing for home, a home that in some ways no longer existed.





## The Pogues

You'll hear a lot of talk in the press about the drinking and drugs. Fair enough. He did a lot of both. But honestly you can walk into any dive bar worth its salt and find some old man who has been relentlessly abusing himself for fifty years. It's not really anything to talk about - unless he's also written some of the greatest songs of all time.

These days, everything is medicalized. And of course Shane was an addict and alcoholic. But he always claimed that derangement of the senses was his path to creative inspiration and frankly it's bullshit to say that never works. It does however have a price and I mourn that his final couple of decades seem to have been bereft of songs.

He burned hard and bright until there didn't seem to be much left to burn. That was his choice. His final years seem to have been spent in a wheelchair watching television.

Occasionally Bob Dylan or Bruce Springsteen would stop by to meet their hero. But I can't complain about what he left us. We weren't entitled to any of it: he gave it freely. He gave it as a poet, a singer, a bard. A shaman, an exorcist, a druid. A rebel, a lover, a scholar. An Irishman. Before Rome's disastrous intervention and Britain's colonization, there was an Irish Christianity that grew organically in Ireland and had pagan roots. The Christ of this tradition was different from the Christ of Europe. He was a Druidic Christ who rode the winds, who howled with the wolves in the wildwood, who spoke with spirits by secret brooks - and also a Christ of the hearth, the fire, the mug of ale shared between friends.

He was a holy trickster, a magician, a storyteller, and God. It's this Christ I like to imagine welcoming Ireland's greatest son home tonight, to a heaven that looks a lot like Tipperary.

## REMEMBERING SHANE MACGOWAN

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Bruce Springsteen: 'They'll Be Singing Shane MacGowan's Songs 100 Years From Now'

**Bruce Springsteen paid tribute to one of his "all-time favorite writers," the former Pogues frontman Shane MacGowan,**

"The passion and deep intensity of his music and lyrics is unmatched by all but the very best in the rock & roll canon," he wrote. "I was fortunate to spend a little time with Shane and his lovely wife Victoria the last time we were in Dublin. He was very ill, but still beautifully present in his heart and spirit. His music is timeless and eternal. I don't know about the rest of us, but they'll be singing Shane's songs 100 years from now."

**Bono paid tribute to MacGowan,** "Shane MacGowan's songs were perfect so he or we, his fans, didn't have to be," the U2 frontman wrote.

**Nick Cave also wrote about his friendship with MacGowan, with whom he once sang "What a Wonderful World,"**

In his Red Hand Files newsletter, Cave recalled how he made an appearance at MacGowan's 60th birthday celebration, where he sang the Pogues' "Summer in Siam" with MacGowan.

The Let Love In singer said the feeling brought to mind Raymond Carver's poem, "Late Fragment." "Shane was not revered just for his manifold talents but also loved for himself alone," Cave wrote. "A beautiful and damaged man, who embodied a kind of purity and innocence and generosity and spiritual intelligence unlike any other."



# SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

Sometimes there can be a lot of things going on in your life. You may be looking for help with a few different things, and a worker at a Needle and Syringe Program can help you.



## SERVICES THAT MAY BE ABLE TO HELP

General Practitioners  
Naloxone Training Providers  
Housing Support Workers  
Legal Services  
Hep c Testing and Treatment services  
Material Aid  
Opioid Replacement Therapy  
Peer Support Services  
Withdrawal Services  
Rehabilitation Services  
Aboriginal Services



Alcohol and Drug Information Service by state and territory. Confidential telephone counselling, information and referral service and operate 24 hours:

ACT (02) 6207 9977

NSW 1800 422 599 (Regional), (02) 9361 8000 (Metropolitan)

NT 1800 131 350

QLD 1800 177 833 (Regional), (07) 3837 5989 (Metropolitan)

SA 1300 131 340

TAS 1800 811 994

VIC 1800 888 236

WA 1800 198 024 (Regional), (08) 9442 5000 (Metropolitan)



# The Mushroom that Became Santa Claus

Samantha Morse

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the woods  
Every shaman was hunting for magical goods;  
In tundras so cold, there's no ash or wisteria,  
But with pine they find Amanita muscaria  
To gift to the villagers both far and near,  
And brighten the winter with psychedelic cheer.

Wait, that's not the version you know?

Professor Ronald Hutton at the University of Bristol has cited the 1822 "Night Before Christmas" poem as the start of the Santa Claus myth. But others disagree. In *Mushrooms and Mankind*, James Arthur asserts that "The Santa Claus, and Christmas holiday (of today) have metamorphosised out of many older mythologies and traditions."

Indeed, for Arthur, mushrooms are at the heart of the origins of Christmas. Similarly, Harvard botany professor Donald Pfister gathers his students together every December to tell a surprising Santa story: one that begins with *Amanita muscaria* magic mushrooms.



## Psychedelic Mushrooms and Christmas Traditions

What do you notice when you look at the *Amanita muscaria* in the image above? It looks pretty different from other magic mushrooms you might be familiar with. Above all, what makes the *Amanita muscaria* distinct is that it's a bright red mushroom with white spots.

It looks a lot like Santa's red and white suit, right? There's also a tradition of these mushrooms being associated with gnomes, "little people", and fairies; hence, Santa's helpers at the North Pole.

The similarities continue when we consider the growing conditions for these vivid shrooms. *Amanita muscaria* is native to the Northern Hemisphere's conifer and deciduous woodlands, and is frequently found growing under pine trees, oak, spruce, fir, birch, and cedar.

Red and white "presents" beneath a fragrant coniferous tree? Hm, sounds a lot like Christmas.

And what about those red and white bulbous ornaments we like to hang on our trees today? Well, in order to dry out *Amanita muscaria* for consumption, shamans would hang the collected hallucinogenic mushrooms on the boughs of trees, explains Sierra College anthropologist, John Rush.

Rush also recounts how shamans would deliver the dried mushrooms as gifts on the winter solstice, which happens the second to last week of December. However, these traveling gift-bearers would frequently encounter a problem: doors were blocked by heavy snow. The solution came in "an opening in the roof through which people entered and exited, thus the chimney story." What an innovative way to deliver hallucinogens!



## Santa Claus and Shamans

Santa Claus is a figure associated with magic and wonder, generosity and miracles. When you think about it, those traits are largely what we expect from shamanic figures. Matthew Salton makes this claim most explicitly for the New York Times: “Santa is a modern counterpart of a shaman, who consumed mind-altering plants and fungi to commune with the spirit world.” Indeed, the English term “shaman” comes from the Russian word *šamán*, which is derived from *samān*, a word in an ancient eastern Siberian language.

And a recent molecular study also proposes that the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom originated in that Siberian-Beringian region. Western explorers first made contact with indigenous Siberian groups in the seventeenth century, but it wasn't until the eighteenth century that the use of psychedelics was reported. In 1939, Swedish academic Åke Ohlmarks popularized the claim that shamans across Siberia use *Amanita muscaria*, also called the fly agaric mushroom. A Hungarian scholar named János Balázs quickly substantiated this assertion, adding that Siberian shamans rely on these mushrooms to induce their trances.

In recent years, however, some anthropologists and historians have debated these claims about the magic mushroom's role in Siberian shamanism. Professor Hutton, for instance, maintains that these practitioners “very rarely took the mushrooms to get trances.”

Still, many people are attracted to the idea that these northern, snow-dwelling, spiritual figures are the prototypes of our modern story of Santa Claus.

Besides Santa, reindeer are some of the most memorable Christmas icons, and they too have a connection to *Amanita muscaria*.

In fact, as deputy editor of the *Pharmaceutical Journal* Andrew Haynes first popularized, reindeer eat *Amanita muscaria* for fun! Haynes hypothesizes that they munch on shrooms to “escape the monotony of dreary long winters.” In this way, they are much like humans and a range of other animals that “have a desire for altered states of consciousness.”

Boston University classics professor, Carl Ruck, has also observed that Rudolph's nose bears a strong resemblance to the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. Perhaps the story of this bright red nose leading Santa through a dark storm is a parable for how magic mushrooms can guide us through periods of inner darkness.

The reindeer weren't the only ones benefiting from the shrooms. There are accounts of shamans and herdsman drinking reindeer urine post-mushroom consumption.

And psychedelic reindeer pee wasn't the only hot commodity. In 1736 a Swedish colonel named Philip Johan von Strahlenberg, who was incarcerated in Siberia during the Great Northern War, published a shocking discovery: impoverished Koryak people drank urine from wealthier people who had access to significant quantities of *Amanita muscaria* mushrooms. In fact, Strahlenberg reported that drug-containing urine could cycle from one individual to another up to five times while still having an intoxicating effect.

Fortunately, that didn't work its way into any of our Christmas traditions.

# VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT APPROVES HEALTH SERVICES TO HAND OUT LIFE-SAVING OVERDOSE-REVERSAL DRUG

Bridget McArthur



VICTORIANS WILL BE ABLE TO GET AN OPIOID OVERDOSE REVERSAL DRUG DIRECTLY FROM ADDICTION SUPPORT SERVICES AT NO COST FROM THIS WEEK, IN A MOVE ADVOCATES SAY IS LONG OVERDUE.

More than one person every day dies of an opioid-related overdose in Victoria, according to the Coroners Court. Yet until now the life-saving drug naloxone was only available when prescribed by a medical practitioner, or supplied over the counter by a pharmacist.

Naloxone will be handed out for free by 18 approved providers at 48 needle and syringe program (NSP) sites across the state, and the Medically Supervised Injecting Room

The \$6.2 million state scheme is part of a federal 'Take Home Naloxone' program launched last year, which funds health services to give out naloxone for free without a prescription, alongside pharmacies.

But it has been up to state and territory governments to say which services can participate – something other states had already done.

Victorian addiction support services have described the program's launch as a bittersweet moment. "It's a super exciting day for people at high risk of overdose to be able to walk into an NSP and get naloxone, it's great, but we wish it was a few months ago," Harm Reduction Victoria CEO Sione Crawford said. "Every month we missed led to more frustration, which made it more difficult to celebrate this day, but we're here."

"I feel like we're celebrating crumbs," Youth Projects' Richie Goonan said. "Our staff are extremely excited to see that we will finally have access to naloxone," he said. "They've been waiting for it for a long time. "They can see our clients are dying. If this was non-drug using life saving medicine it would probably already be sorted by now."

"We've learnt that if we just wait for the department to move this along it won't happen," Mr Goonan said. "But we can see that there's a light at the end of the tunnel."



## WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH CONSERVATIVES?

PADADOZ MAHONE

There is a scene in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where a gentleman asks Scrooge for a donation to help the poor at Christmas, and Scrooge replies by telling him to sod off,

*"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.*

*"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.*

*"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge.*

*"Are they still in operation?"*

*"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."*

*"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.*

*"Both very busy, sir."*

*"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm very glad to hear it."*

Dickens knew a lot about being poor. When he was a kid in 1824, his dad ended up in prison because he couldn't pay his debts. Debtors' prisons were horrible places that were overcrowded, diseased, rat-filled holes, where people who couldn't clear the money they owed were dumped to rot until they paid. Ironically, if you had some money you could pay the warders and live an ok life. I'll put something about them in the next issue.

The whole family except Charles himself and his older sister ended up living in their dad's cell, while on the outside, Charles worked like a dog to raise the money to pay the debts and get them out. He was twelve years old.

Eventually, through good fortune, Charles' dad came into some cash and the family got out. If he hadn't got that money, they might have been in there for years. You can tell that Dickens was totally traumatised by his experience of being poor.

Through all his books, the wealthy are seen as morally corrupt and indifferent to the harrowing struggles of the poor. The conservative values of the ruling class are shown negatively as a force that upheld social injustice.

The dehumanising effects of sticking rigidly to the class system, traditional norms and economic policies are clear, and the conservatives look down their noses at the poor, who they see as little better than animals. Put simply, the conservatives were assholes.

Now, just like then, the ruling class generally lean towards conservative attitudes because they have a vested interest in keeping the established power systems. I don't just mean politicians, but also the ones who define our culture. The media magnates, the lobbyists, the super wealthy who pull the strings. Those that believe they are deserving of the best things in life because of who and what they are, and believe the poor are greedy if they want a better life.

Their access to education and resources (including good food, secure homes, and daddy's friends) landed them up at the top end of town, no matter how many times they tell you they pulled themselves up by the bootstraps. Their conservative world view is based on what's good for them, rather than society.

They are the rule makers. It's they that decide how the rest of us should behave, though they rarely see themselves as subject to those same rules.

The laws they make are for us to live by and for them to break when it suits them. Like Scrooge's callousness before his transformation, the modern conservative is focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation. The poor man that steals does so out of moral weakness and should be punished, the rich man that steals is simply taking advantage of an opportunity. In business, they win, and if they lose, they're bailed out, so they don't really lose. Take the big banks who privatise their profits and socialise their losses when we bail them out.

Conservatives' views on the environment too are like Scrooge's initial attitude to the ghost of Marley when he rocked up in chains. The denial of the evidence that might cost them, even when it's in front of their eyes.

*"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.*

*"I don't," said Scrooge.*

*"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"*

*"I don't know," said Scrooge.*

*"Why do you doubt your senses?"*

*"Because" said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato.*

*There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"*

The reluctance to address the long-term consequences of climate change mirrors the short-sightedness that Dickens spoke of when he wrote about Marley's warnings for Scrooge's future. Though I suspect the oil companies and mining magnate climate deniers know that the perils are very real, but they have skin in the game. Pretending you don't believe your cash cow is killing the world is easier than trying to justify it.

And then there's trickle-down economics, the central pillar of conservative economic theory. The promise that wealth will eventually work its way down is about as fanciful an idea as anything Scrooge came up against. Give wealth to the rich and they'll keep it. If they didn't, we wouldn't need a taskforce to try and get them to pay their fair share of tax.

For me though, the greatest irony of conservative attitudes is the link to evangelical Christian movements. The way they view issues like abortion and LGBTQ+ rights creates a moral landscape like the world Dicken's lived in, where choices are shaped by social expectations and religious values. Though frankly, I think it's a bit too coincidental that many evangelicals believe that God rewards good people with money. Wealthy = good, poor = bad. It makes it easier to treat the poor like shit if you think they brought it on themselves through their bad choices and immoral behaviour.

At the end of *A Christmas Carol* Scrooge was transformed, not through fear of the future, but by the realisation that a good life is not about looking after yourself and fuck all the rest. Scrooge cast off his conservative attitudes and became a better person for it.

Sadly, most conservatives don't see the world like that, but more a fight to get as much as they can for themselves, and that raising others up, in some way diminishes their position in the world. In the end you've got to ask, what the fuck is wrong with conservatives?

*'A merry Christmas, Bob,' said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. 'A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year. I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob. Make up the fires and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.'*

*Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world.*



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# Phrenology was a racist pseudoscience and it took Australia by storm in the 19th century

Nick Baker and Ann Arnold

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*For some in the 19th century, phrenology provided answers to difficult life questions. (Image Supplied: Wellcome Collection, public domain)*

Phrenology is clearly nonsense.

The pseudoscience, which involves drawing conclusions about a person from the shape of their head, was contested from its outset and widely discredited within decades.

It also has deeply racist overtones, having been used to prop-up flawed ideas of racial superiority and act as a justification for slavery.

But, throughout the 19th century, phrenology took many parts of the world by storm — including Australia.

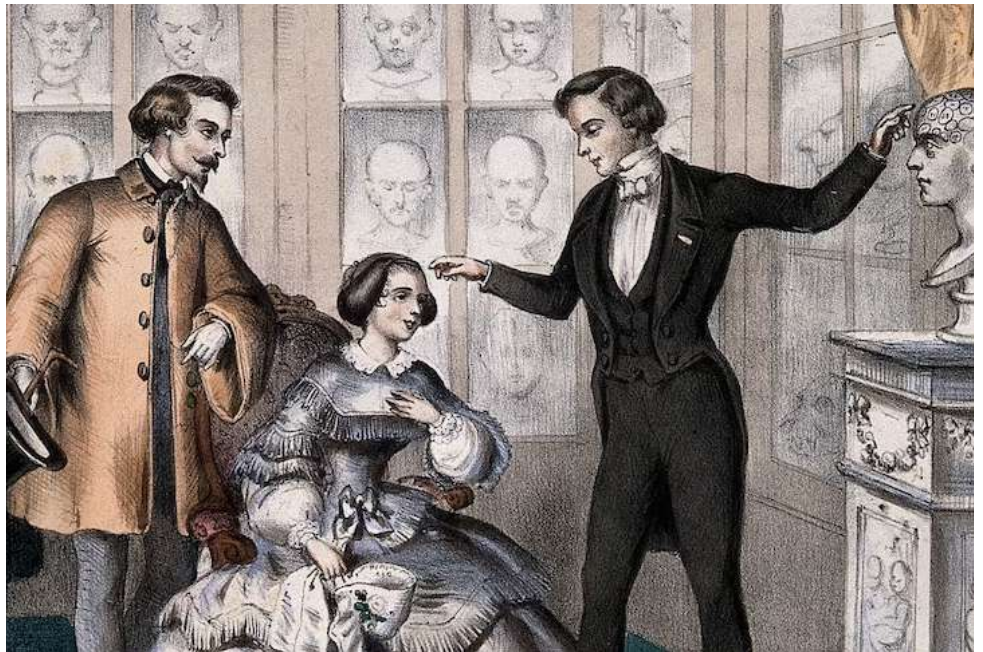
This was mostly thanks to a group of travelling phrenologists with some questionable motives and tactics.

Phrenology was based on the idea that head shape could indicate a person's character and intellect.

## What is phrenology?

This "science" was developed by physiologist and anatomist Franz Joseph Gall in Vienna during the late 18th century, states award-winning historian Alexandra Roginski.

It held huge popular sway," says Dr Roginski, a visiting fellow at Deakin University and the State Library of NSW, and the author of a new book on phrenology.



Gall believed that the brain was divided into 27 so-called "organs" that were responsible for every aspect of our personality and behaviour.

"Different parts of the brain do particular things, but the things that he determined and mapped were out of alignment with what we know about the brain today," Dr Roginski says.

According to Gall and his successors, a bump here could mean you were good at music, another one there may mean you were gifted in languages.

Everything from vanity to religiosity to "the tendency to murder" could be divulged from the cranial landscape.

James Bradley, a senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne's School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, says there were many applications in the early-to-mid 19th century.

"It definitely had some impact within the courts in the USA and in Britain," he says.

"For example, if you had an overdeveloped 'organ of destructiveness' then the likelihood was that you couldn't help yourself and therefore couldn't be held criminally responsible."

But phrenology wasn't just for medical professionals or lawyers. The general public became fascinated with it, too.

For a fee, a phrenologist would read the contours of your head and provide advice, like how to find that perfect career or maybe an ideal partner

It had "an enormous appeal" among 19th century people "who were focused upon improving themselves", Dr Bradley says.

After Gall's new "science" spread around Europe, it reached Australia, with the earliest phrenological society beginning here in 1829.



*1879 sketch of a phrenologist working on Melbourne's Bourke Street. Supplied: State Library Victoria)*

## PHRENOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

But it really took off in the mid-1800s, when travelling lecturers — both local and from overseas — would make phrenological presentations around the colonies.

Dr Roginski says Australia was a place of growth, mobility and flux, which proved fertile ground for people mixing "science" and entertainment.

"There were people making up credentials. There was a dress that they would wear — top hats and frock coats. They were calling themselves 'professor'," she says.

Or as Dr Bradley puts it, this "popular phrenology" was "a kind of pre-astrology within popular culture".

Though sometimes sceptical, Australian crowds still flocked to see these pseudoscientists. Among them was Irishman "Professor Bruce" who landed in Tasmania in 1870 and lectured around the east coast of Australia and New Zealand, reading the heads of townspeople

According to Dr Roginski, this so-called professor was a "theatrical amateur" who, like many other travelling phrenologists, was likely "deeply opportunistic".

## THE WONDERFUL WOMAN

It was not only men practising phrenology in Australia.

Madame Sibly, also known as the Wonderful Woman, was a well-known lecturer in phrenology and mesmerism — another pseudoscience, involving invisible natural forces.

"She was very smart, very confident and charismatic by all accounts ... She demonstrated that flair for showmanship," Dr Roginski says.

In her elaborate, bejewelled costume, Madame Sibly wowed audiences around eastern Australia, touring with her children in tow.

An 1870 Bendigo newspaper advertisement trumpeted her show "Parental Love; or the Management of Children", adding that she would also be at the Shamrock Hotel for consultations on "phrenology and the cure of deafness".

## Across the ditch

Phrenology also spread to New Zealand, where it had one particularly famous practitioner.

Benjamin Strachan was a man of African descent, purportedly American by birth, who lived in New Zealand in the mid-to-late 1800s.

"He did various things — he was a hairdresser, he ran stage shows, he had this slightly grifty edge to his personality," Dr Roginski says.

Then she says he made a "remarkable transformation" to a premier phrenological lecturer.

Changing his name from Benjamin Strachan to Lio Medo, he lectured around New Zealand, using plaster casts of bushranger Ned Kelly's head in his demonstrations.

But along the way, he also had to negotiate racial stereotypes and racist criticism.

Dr Roginski says there are also "fleeting" snippets that surfaced in various archives of Māori phrenologists working in New Zealand. This includes one 1878 reference to a Māori phrenologist named Tawhire who read the head of then-Native Minister John Sheehan.

## Indigenous Australians

In her research, Dr Roginski found records of Indigenous Australians "passing their own judgements" on phrenology.

In a 1905 lecture, for example, Indigenous activist Hugh Anderson described one interaction, when a phrenologist visited an Indigenous community.

A newspaper article about the lecture retells how the phrenologist was taken out in a canoe to the middle of the river, where an Indigenous man asked him, "Do you know anything about 'swim'-ology'?" before capsizing the boat.



Madame Sibly was one of the most famous 'popular science' lecturers in colonial Australia, pictured here in 1870. (Supplied: National Portrait Gallery Collection)

It's a moment where this group is making fun of the phrenologist," Dr Roginski says.

But, like elsewhere in the world, phrenology was used to dehumanise Indigenous people in Australia, and involved the collecting of Indigenous skulls.

It plays into a universal desire to "transform [ourselves] and become different types of people". And "we all want to change" for the better, he says.

"The way [phrenology] manifested was as part of this process of dispossession and oppression of First Nations peoples — so it's really important that this is always foregrounded, when we talk about it," Dr Roginski says.

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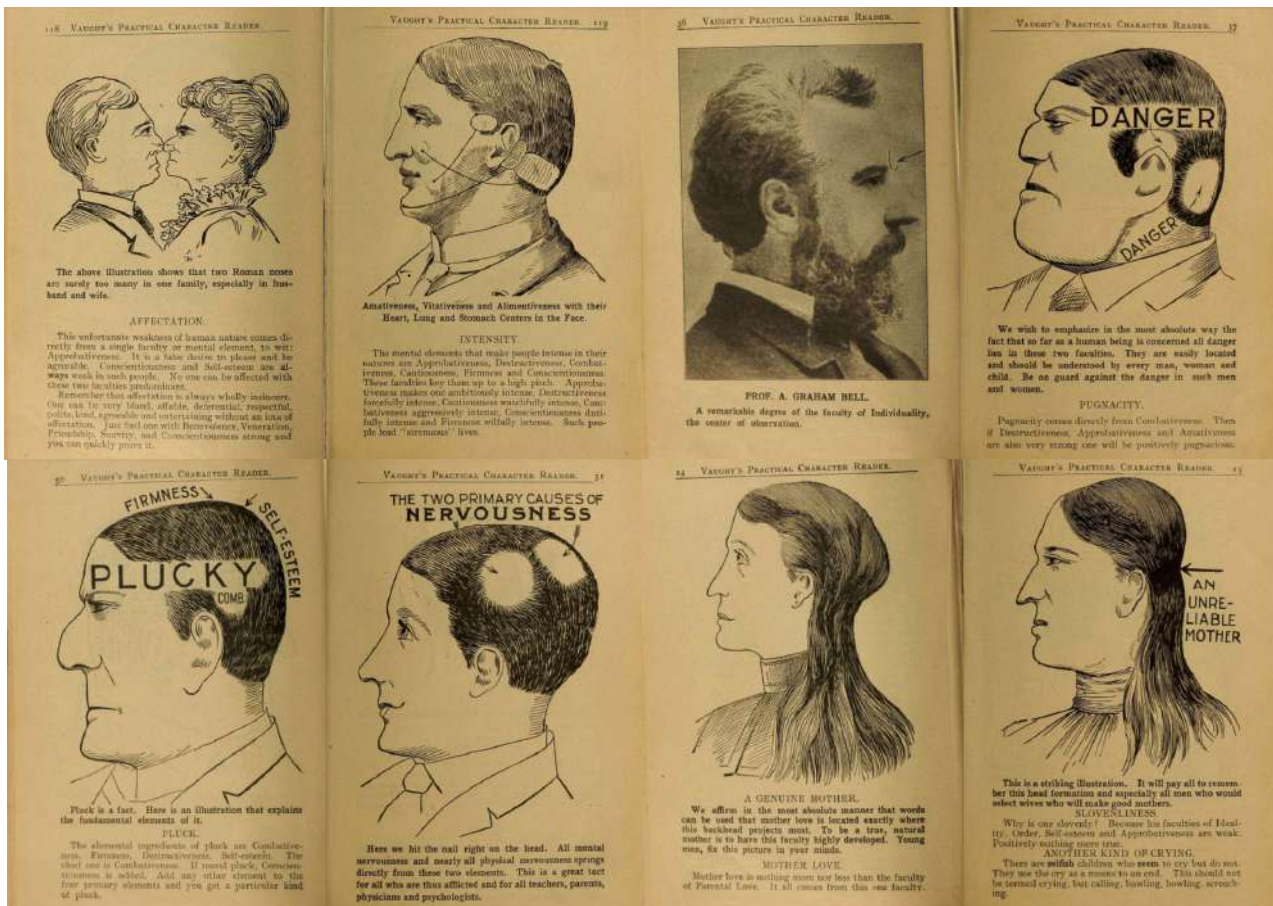
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It plays into a universal desire to "transform [ourselves] and become different types of people". And "we all want to change" for the better, he says.

However flawed, Dr Roginski says phrenology can illustrate much about the society of the day. And while popular phrenology was at its height in Australia more than 150 years ago, there are some parallels with today.

For Dr Bradley, it's about the relationship between science and the world of self-help."Cutting-edge, radical science often becomes quickly integrated into various self-help movements, because it provides an authority for the ideas that are being put forward."

## Examples of Phrenology Charts



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