

## **The Two Doctors**

Andrew Hurley

In February 1842 Leichhardt arrived in Sydney. A Prussian, but travelling on British papers. With learning, but no formal qualification in his chosen field. He set about discovering the flora, fauna and geology of Sydney and environs. Although he never held himself out to be a doctor, he suffered others using the appellation. 150 years later, Leichhardt was followed by Hans Finger, a Bavarian economic consultant with no formal training in history, but a penchant for travel writing; Finger made his own discovery at the State Library: “I read some of Leichhardt’s diary and I was fascinated by this man - the deeper I went into it, the more I was fascinated.”<sup>1</sup> That fascination would propel Finger into a battle with the Department of Immigration.

Leichhardt’s achievements were besmirched in Australia, as he was criticised for poor leadership, poor bushcraft and monomania. Having disappeared he could not actively intervene. But by the time Finger discovered Leichhardt in 1992, the explorer had been partly rehabilitated, including by Colin Roderick’s 1988 biography.<sup>2</sup> Leichhardt’s reputation in Germany was another matter. Until the fall of the Wall in 1989, he was largely East German property; the subject of an official biography that slanted his reputation in a socialist direction.<sup>3</sup> Finger now discovered Leichhardt for a wider German audience, including by writing a biography.<sup>4</sup> That might have been an end to it. Yet eleven years later Finger sought to migrate to Australia to work on Leichhardt’s pre-Sydney diaries.<sup>5</sup>

Distinguished talent visas, relevantly, are for “persons who have an internationally recognised record of exceptional and outstanding achievement in [...] academia and research [...] who will make substantial contributions to the Australian community”<sup>6</sup> The Department concluded that Finger did not have such a record, but he fought in the Migration Review Tribunal and won. The Tribunal wrestled with questions like whether translating and annotating without undertaking “any thorough analysis of the work or written academic work” was “research and academia.”<sup>7</sup> It touched on the research value of a book that “describes much but interprets little”.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, the Tribunal was swayed by the evidence of the historian and bookseller Dan Sprod, the museum curator Tom Darragh, and the academic Angus Nicholls.<sup>9</sup> Darragh suggested that Finger had “condensed and explained an enormous amount of handwritten material and added to its value through his German background.”<sup>10</sup> He favourably compared Finger’s biography with Colin Roderick’s; “Roderick was a Professor of English and it is written in a different style to Finger’s work and

ought not to be compared too closely in that regard.”<sup>11</sup> Nicholls was the clincher, writing that Finger’s work was a “major contribution[] to scholarly knowledge about Leichhardt.”<sup>12</sup> Looking forward, Sprod suggested that not granting the visa would mean that “a lot of the Leichhardt associated manuscripts would remain untranslated and unavailable to the Australian public.”<sup>13</sup>

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Having fought to come to Australia to work on the diaries, and having established his eminence in the field of “Leichhardt Studies”, Finger migrated in late 2012. His victory was reported in *The Australian*. His 1999 biography was published in English translation the following year.<sup>14</sup> However, Finger subsequently returned to Munich. One of the major upshots of his battle with the Department is therefore that we now have a legal precedent – albeit not terribly authoritative – attesting to what excellence in academia and research is. Could we soon see research grant aspirants use it to seek declaratory relief in the courts that their own track record is excellent?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Lane, Bernard. “Octogenarian historian to migrate to Australia to work on Leichhardt diaries.” *The Australian*. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/octogenarian-historian-to-migrate-to-australia-to-work-on-leichhardt-diaries/story-e6frg6nf-1226514018382#>>

<sup>2</sup> Roderick, Colin. *Leichhardt: The Dauntless Explorer*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Haufe, Heinz. *Entdeckungsreisen in Australien: Ludwig Leichhardt, ein deutsches Forscherschicksal*. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1972. See also Andrew Hurley. “Son of the soil, proto-socialist or free spirit? Heinz Haufe’s *Entdeckungsreisen in Australien* and the rehabilitation of Ludwig Leichhardt in East Germany.” *Limbus* 6 (2013): 209-224.

<sup>4</sup> Finger’s two major works are *Leichhardt: die ganze Geschichte von F. W. Ludwig Leichhardt, Träumer, Forscher und Entdeckungsreisender in Australien: erzählt von ihm selbst und seinem Chronisten nach seinen hinterlassenen Tagebüchern, Briefen und Reiseaufzeichnungen*. Göttingen: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 1999. and *Das unmögliche wagen: ein australisches Epos: Ludwig Leichhardt - Wanderer zwischen Traum, Wissenschaft und Anspruch*. Munich: Finger, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> The Australian diaries, translated by Thomas Darragh, have been published by Queensland Museum, Thomas Darragh and Roderick Fensham, eds. *Leichhardt Diaries: Early Travels in Australia During 1842-1844*. South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 2013. Finger was to work on the five or six pre-Sydney diaries and some unpublished letters—held at the State Library of NSW—farming them out to others, like Rolf Striegler, to translate. This intention is extracted from the Migration Review Tribunal Decision 1104434 [2012] MRTA 2769. 19 Sept. 2012, para. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Decision, para. 6. See also section 65 of the *Migration Act 1958*.

<sup>7</sup> Decision, para. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Decision, para. 31. This was the opinion of one German reviewer of Finger’s 1999 Biography: Ernst Horst. “Rezension: Sachbuch: Australisches Abenteuer.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 31 Aug.

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2000. <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezension-sachbuch-australisches-abenteuer-1214629.html>>

<sup>9</sup> Sprod is a retired librarian who founded Blubber Head Press in 1978. He is the author of eight books on Australian history, including two on Leichhardt [*Proud Intrepid Heart: Leichhardt's first attempt to the Swan River, 1846-1847* (1989) and *Leichhardt's Expeditioners: in the Australian wilderness, 1844-1845* (2006), both published by Blubber Head Press]. He was made an OAM in 1993 for his "... contribution to historical writing and publishing," is a Fellow of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, was awarded the Clive Lord Memorial Medal of the Royal Society of Tasmania (2004) and is an Honorary Life Member of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association. Darragh is a palaeontologist who worked at the Museum of Victoria as an administrator and curator until 2001. He translated Leichhardt's early Australian diaries (see note 5). Nicholls is a German Studies scholar at Queen Mary College, University of London.

<sup>10</sup> Decision, para. 63.

<sup>11</sup> Decision, para. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Decision, para. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Decision, para. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Finger, Hans. *Ludwig Leichhardt: Lost in the Outback*. Judith Simpson, ed. Kylie Crane, trans. Dural: Rosenberg Publishing, 2013.