

Behind the Cover

By Emma Janssen

Behind the cover of a book about almost everything, lives a vast array of illustrations intertwined with cheeky humour from one of Australia's cherished and celebrated author-illustrators.

You won't find his name on the front cover nor on the imprint/verso page. You'll have to turn over the book and discover his name hidden within the blurb.

In the early 1980s, Five Mile Press commissioned a well-known illustrator named Bob Graham. Bob had just moved from Sydney to Melbourne and was keen to further develop his portfolio. However, this project would be slightly different from what he would later be recognised for.

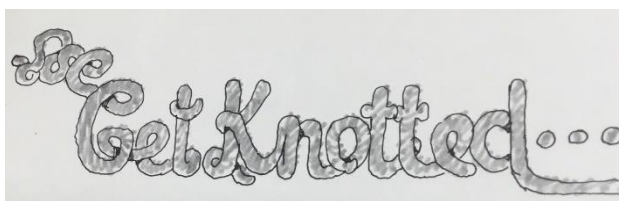
Consisting of 192 pages, Roland Harvey's Incredible Book of Almost Everything published in 1984 is a collection of fun facts, how things work, short stories and how to make instructions. Contributions can be found from Alan Baille, Peter Smith, Jean Chapman, Doug MacLeod, Nan Hunt, Lyndon Rose, Lotars Ginters, Jack Newman, Heather Philpott, Frank Trebianni, Hazel Edwards, Eve Pownall and of course, Roland Harvey.

A significant contributor is Bob Graham, not only for his illustrations, but also for the fun facts he delivers in an engaging and amusing way.

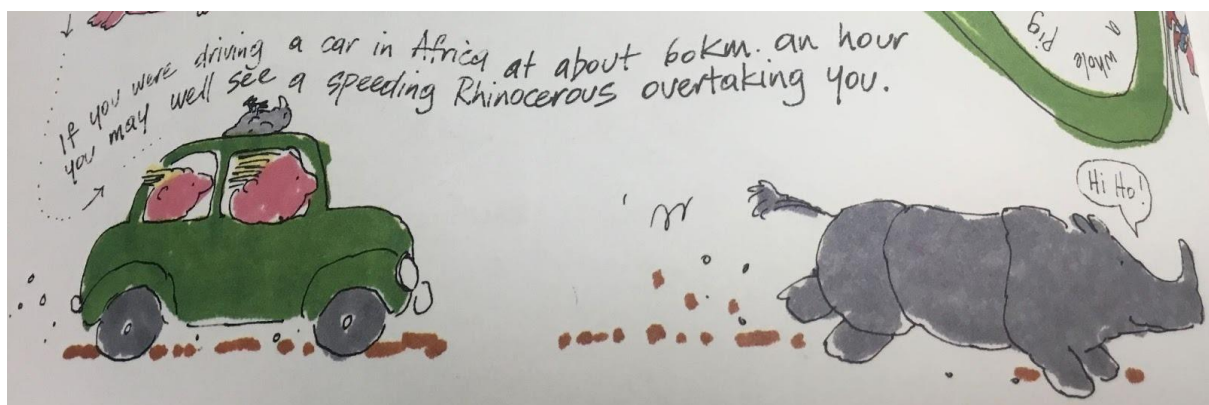
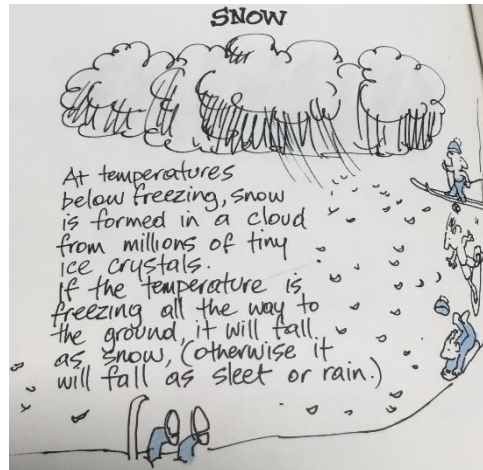
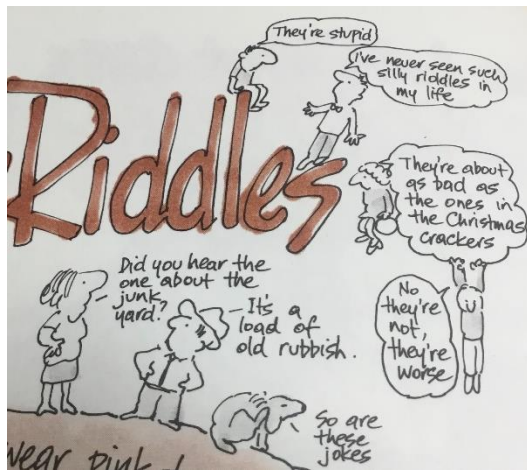
During my time cataloguing Bob's original artwork from the book, I was acquainted with a few familiar features and techniques which might be interpreted as glimpses of the future.

Four key themes or elements can be seen throughout his contributions, ranging from his distinctive handwritten typeset and witty humour to unique brushstrokes and touches of humanity.

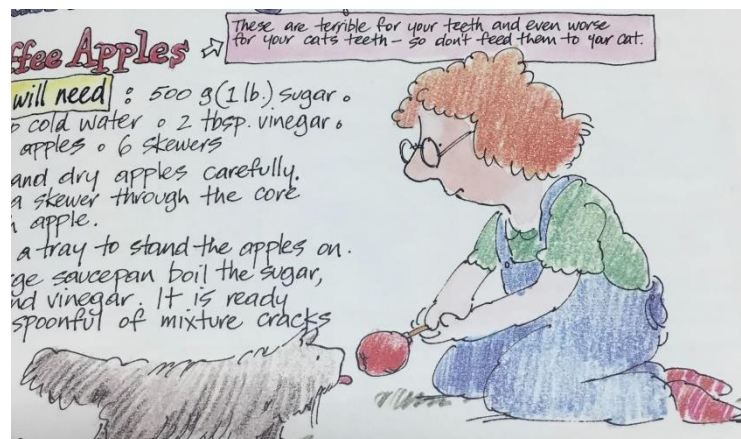
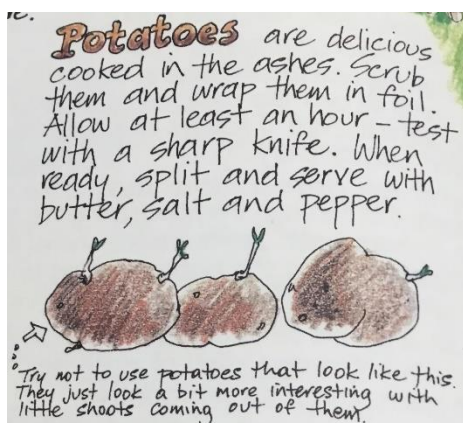
Let's commence by taking a closer look at his distinctive handwritten typeset and calligrams, which are where the word/s create a visual image connecting to a theme. I wonder if he sketched the surfing calligram first to establish the composition.



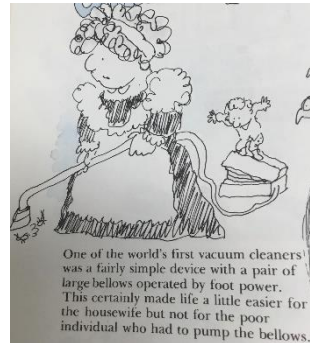
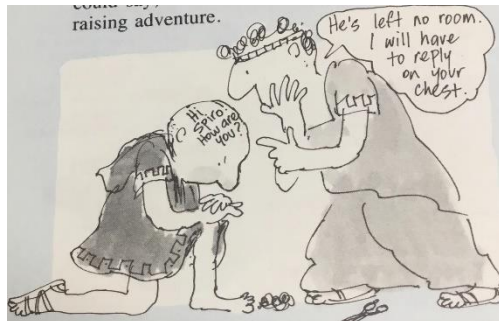
When handwriting the page content, Bob has also added humour in both the written and illustrative form with title characters complaining about the quality of the riddles, skiers testing their luck down a steep slope and a rhinoceros greeting passengers as it passes at 60 km an hour.



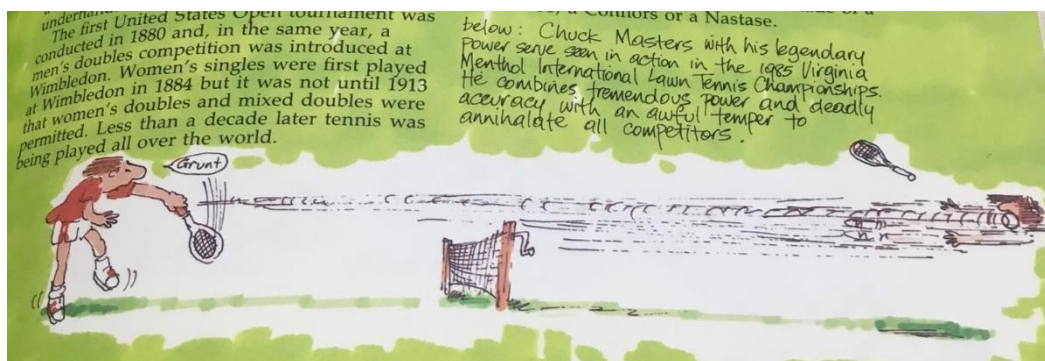
On some pages, Bob has provided amusing disclaimers when he has decided to draw something a little more interesting than the norm. Can you spot them?



Which illustration has a dog lover talking to the wrong end or a secret spy about to have his chest used to send a message?



You can feel the velocity of the ball being hit by Chuck Masters and start to get giddy with the man on the street exercising on the horizontal bar.





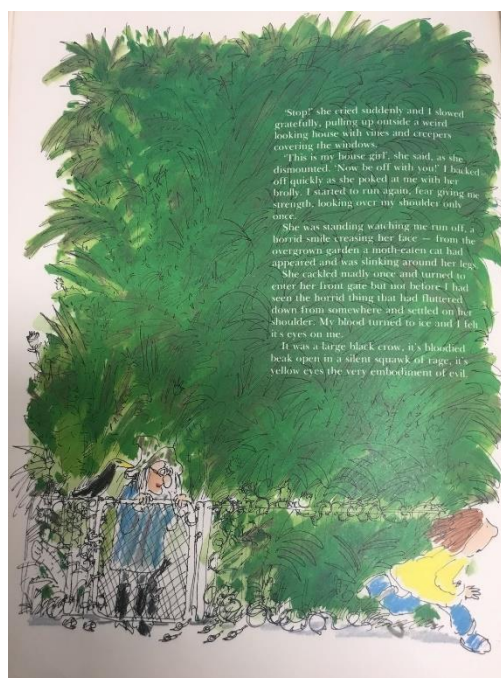
Unique brushstrokes creating memorable characters are sprinkled across the pages.



Touches of humanity are found here and there. Can you feel the warmth and compassion radiating from the Roman and the serviceman?



Does the soft pastel glow of the grandma remind you of any characters or the overgrown prickly garden remind you of any books?



Just when you think you know everything there is to know about Bob Graham's artwork, a few intricate surprises pop out from the pages. What an intriguing artist he is.

Emma Janssen:



A primary school teacher for two decades, Emma Janssen adores sharing picture books and junior fiction with children. Her passions include writing quality children's literature and empowering students to see themselves as writers and readers by assisting them to write and illustrate their own published picture books. Emma works for an international educational publishing company that publishes her picture books, a junior fiction series and supporting resources.