

Summary

Bill Pidgeon's career spanned from the mid-1920s through the 1970s. He started out in the newspaper industry and quickly forged a name in the local Sydney press, known as "Wep". In 1933 he helped create the dummy for *The Australian Women's Weekly* with his friend and the magazine's first editor, George Warnecke. Working for Consolidated Press he became well known throughout Australia for his political cartoons, comic strips, illustrations, his covers and war paintings for *The Australian Women's Weekly*, which are now collectables today. However, Bill's true passion was his painting and in January 1949 he resigned from Consolidated Press to focus on winning Australia's most prestigious prize for portraiture, the Archibald Prize. Not only did he achieve that aim but he won the award three times. However, his earlier career always overshadowed the success of his painting with headlines such as "Cartoonist wins Archibald."

In 1956 he was diagnosed with glaucoma in both eyes and underwent a total of six operations on his eyes to remove cataracts and ultimately his eye lenses. By the 1970s he was deemed legally blind. The difficulties he faced with his eyesight were always kept very private for fear of losing valuable commissions.

Shortly after Bill's glaucoma diagnosis he was invited by the Romanian Government to visit Romania on a Cultural Exchange trip. It was his only trip overseas despite a yearning to see the works of the great masters of Europe since the late 1920s. In addition to Romania, Bill took the opportunity to visit Rome and Venice in Italy, Munich in Germany, Vienna and Budapest whilst in transit to Bucharest, Romania. His stay was cut short due to the pending threat of the Soviets quelling the uprising rebellion in Hungary. He spent an extended period in Paris, France catching up with an old colleague and then London, England. In order to travel behind the "Iron Curtain", Bill had to get special permission from the Australian Government and as a consequence came under the scrutiny of the Australian Security Intelligence Office (ASIO) for the next three years as a potential Communist sympathiser.

Due to his failing sight, Bill completed his last portrait in early 1973. King Watson, Bill's friend and editor of Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph* asked him if he would be interested in standing in for their regular political cartoonist which he agreed to do between 1974-1975. In addition, he returned to art reviews for the *Sunday Telegraph* with a weekly column from 1974 to 1979.

Bill was never a commercial artist. He painted for the love of it and would rather give his works away than sell them. He never had a solo exhibition and only ever participated in group exhibitions. Consequently, not many works have changed hands and even though very well known during his life, since his death, awareness of his name has slipped from the visibility of the modern art world.

20th Century Australian Artist

William Edwin Pidgeon, known simply to many as Bill, Billy, Bill Pidgeon, Wep, Weppie, Billy Wep, Pidge, or more formally, W.E. Pidgeon or Pidgeon, but usually either Wep or Bill, was born January 7, 1909 at home in Paddington, the son of a glazier, Frederick Castledine Pidgeon and Thirza Jessie (White) of 'Pleasant Villa', 290 Glenmore Road, Paddington, N.S.W.. The house was one of many terraces built in the area in the 1880s by his maternal grandfather, John White, a master builder and long-time alderman and Mayor of Paddington. Following his father's premature death in 1913 at age 38, Bill, then aged four, along with his mother, also known as Cis and older brother John, moved to 'Trelawney', his grandfather's home at 3 Gurner Street, Paddington, where he lived during his initial formative school years before returning to 290 Glenmore Road.

Early Days

Bill attended Glenmore Road Public School then Darlinghurst Public School obtaining his Qualifying Certificate in February 1921. He then attended Sydney Technical School, passing the Intermediate Certificate in March 1923 and was awarded a scholarship to continue towards his Leaving Certificate, awarded in May 1925. His formal art training amounted to six months at the J.S. Watkins Art School and two months at Sydney Technical College including some time spent at Sydney Long's studio in pursuit of an interest in etching. Although planning to become an electrical engineer, his interest grew in comic drawing from doing drawings for the school magazine, his first appearing in September 1923 under his nom de plume, 'Wep'.¹

Bill's early interest in drawing draftsmanship had been inspired by the oil paintings and life drawings done by his father, Fred, who attended Royal Art School classes at night and associated with contemporary artists such as Fred Leist. He would go through his father's collection of *The Studio* journals, an English illustrated magazine of fine and applied art, and occasionally copy drawings from them.²

In 1925, upon completion of his Leaving Certificate, Bill first gained employment as an office boy at Wunderlich's pressed metal ceiling factory in Surrey Hills where he met fellow artist Bill Dobell, who was their advertising draughtsman. Coincidentally, through the 1940s to 1960s, both artists would each go on to win the Archibald Prize for portraiture three times.

While still at Wunderlich's, Wep was shortly afterwards employed as a Cadet Newspaper Artist at the *Evening News* and *Sunday News*, following a suggestion by his dentist uncle (Septimus E. Patterson), "armed with forceps and needles," to patient Marmion Dart, editor of the paper.³

At age 16, Wep's first cartoon "A Crossword Tragedy" was published in the *Sunday News*, April 12, 1925. His first comic strip *The Trifling Triplets* was published September 1926⁴ in the *Sunday News*, and ran for nine months.

¹ The (Sydney) *Technical High School Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 1; Sep 1923

² The *Studio* magazines are still held within Wep's personal archive

³ Handwritten biography, William Edwin Pidgeon Archive

⁴ Ryan, J., *Panel by Panel: An illustrated history of Australian Comics*, Cassell Australia 1979, p30

In September 1927 Wep joined editor Eric Baume as a Newspaper Artist for *The Daily Guardian* and *Smith's Weekly*, owned by Smith's Newspapers and co-founded by Robert Clyde Packer. It was here that he met lifelong friend, George Warnecke who was chief sub-editor for *The Daily Guardian* and subsequently editor of *The Sunday Guardian* following its establishment in 1929 and where Wep also became the illustrator for humorist Lennie Lower's column. Following the sale of the *Guardian* to *The Sun* (Associated Newspapers) during the Depression, Wep was sacked, claiming managing editor Herbert Campbell-Jones did not like the way he drew noses; pointed, much like his own.

The Depression Era

In 1929 Bill met Jessie Ann Graham, a stenographer with the Coastal Farmers' Co-operative Society Limited. Romance bloomed and a new interest in skiing at Mount Kosciuszko followed suit where Jess would travel each year along with other Millions Club Ski members for their annual holidays.

In 1931, following several years residing at Bondi, Bill and his mother returned to their original family home at 290 Glenmore Road where he remained until marrying Jess, in August 1933. They celebrated their honeymoon at the Hotel Kosciuszko.

Throughout the Depression Wep turned to freelance work. In partnership with Raymond Lindsay, James E. Flett, George Finey and James Emery he illustrated *Trio*, a book of poems by Kenneth Slessor, Harley Matthews and Colin Simpson; a limited edition of 75 copies from fledgling publisher, Sunnybrook Press. He would later gain praise from President Franklin D. Roosevelt for his woodcut illustrations in a second limited edition publication of 150 copies from Sunnybrook Press in 1937 of Carboni Raffaello's *The Eureka Stockade*, presented to Roosevelt by Attorney-General Dr. H.V. Evatt. Roosevelt stated "The book itself is a rare work in typography, paper, format, and in particular the illustrations. I think the woodcuts are particularly fine."⁵

In October 1931 Wep joined the initial staff of the Federal Labor Party's newspaper *The World*, a daily newspaper published by the Australian Workers' Union, however its financial collapse in November 1932 found him unemployed once again. At the same time, with a plan developed by George Warnecke, Robert Clyde Packer set the wheels in motion for his son Frank, in conjunction with E.G. (Ted) Theodore to form Sydney Newspapers Limited with the aim of acquiring *The World*⁶. For £100, they purchased the rights to lease the masthead and plant for one year, announcing the newspaper would be re-branded as *The Star* and priced at 1d (one penny), compared with 1½d for its major rival *The Sun*, published by Associated Newspapers Limited of which Packer senior was an executive. Hugh Denison, the managing director of Associated Newspapers, paid Theodore and Frank Packer £86,500 in return for an agreement from them not to publish a daily or Sunday newspaper for three years.

Following the collapse of *The World*, Wep returned to freelance work, mainly for *The Sunday Sun* and *Wireless Weekly* but also occasional work for the *Daily Telegraph*, *Smith's Weekly*, *Referee*, *Arrow*, *The Bulletin* and *The Australian Woman's Mirror*. He

⁵ Artist Wep praised by Roosevelt (1943, April 11). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p.5. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article247881769>

⁶ Griffen-Foley, B., *The House of Packer: The making of a media empire*, Allen & Unwin 1999, pp20-24

also illustrated Colin Wills's book, *Rhymes of Sydney*, published by Frank C. Johnson in January 1933, his first major book illustration.

The Australian Women's Weekly and Consolidated Press

In early 1933, working with George Warnecke, Wep created the original prototype print dummy of *The Australian Women's Weekly*. Unable to fund the project himself, George sold the concept to Frank Packer who along with Ted Theodore and their fresh injection of capital thanks to Hugh Dennison's deal for them not to publish a daily, launched the weekly newspaper in June 1933 under Sydney Newspapers. Wep re-established his partnership with Lennie Lower with whom he had collaborated at *The Sunday Guardian* and who had also joined *The Australian Women's Weekly* from inception. In conjunction, Wep continued as a regular contributor for *Wireless Weekly* until 1938 as well as the *To-Day* journal during 1934.

Wep became well known for his regular comic strip, *In and Out of Society*, a satirical look at the emancipated woman and marital discord, his illustrations for Lennie Lower's humorous column and most of all his painted cover illustrations of everyday life, signed with his initials, "Wep," many of which had parallels to those of his contemporary, Norman Rockwell in *The Saturday Evening Post*, America's most popular magazine.

In Neil Currey's 1983 book, *Humour in the Weekly*,⁷ Dorothy Drain, a former editor and long-time employee of the *Weekly* noted when the *Weekly* first started, its initial star attraction was Lennie Lower. With Wep illustrating Lower's humorous column with equally mad cartoons, Drain recalled the Lower page was probably a major factor in the meteoric circulation rise of those early years and it was surely one of the main reasons that men as well as women became regular readers.

In 1936, Sydney Newspapers joined forces with Associated Newspapers to acquire the *Daily Telegraph*, forming a new company, Consolidated Press. Wep remained on board contributing to *The Australian Women's Weekly* with illustrations for short stories as well as cartoons for Lower's column, his comic strip, *In and Out of Society* in addition to political and other social commentary cartoons and comic strips for the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Sunday Telegraph* when it was established in 1939.

In late 1936 Bill purchased a Jennison Supreme pop-top caravan in which he, accompanied by wife Jess, took a leave of absence for six months to travel around New South Wales and southeast Queensland with an aim to develop his own style of painting.

In January 1940, Bill and Jess moved to 'St Margaret,' at 85 Northwood Road, Northwood, on the Lane Cove River, home to fellow artists Lloyd Rees, George Lawrence, John Santry and some years earlier, Norman Lindsay, initially renting the property. The house had been built circa 1920 by Harry Charles Allen, who had recently relocated to Victoria Barracks, Melbourne with the Department of the Navy. Bill also became the local Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) Warden.

⁷ O'Neil, Currey & Australian Women's Weekly (1983). *Humour in the weekly*. Currey O'Neil ; Melbourne : distributed by Gordon and Gotch, South Yarra, Vic

In June 1943, Wep applied for accreditation as an Official War Artist and was advised he was next in line for appointment. The following month, at short notice, he was sent by the *'Weekly'* to Darwin and northwest Australia for two months with the brief to undertake a complete compilation of daily life in the north.⁸ His ten-year wedding anniversary was only a month away.

Wep was a keen observer of people and his environment. Though he considered himself a timid individual, he was outwardly gregarious and often found himself running into people he knew or knew of whilst on assignment in the war zone. In doing so, he typically presented a sense of ease and casualness with all that he engaged with. Equipped with a good sense of humour, Wep was readily able to make fun of himself; his ability to mix freely with officers and enlisted men alike, unlike many other journalists who he wrote were often despised by many of the troops, provided him with significant insight to their daily lives. His letters to wife Jess provide an even deeper engagement with his wartime experiences, especially of that which he observed, his self-deprecating humour and his fascination with the beauty of the surroundings he found himself in, despite being in a war zone.

Wep celebrated his tenth wedding anniversary in Darwin alone, having just returned from Bathurst Island the day before. He eventually made it home September 3. He produced so much material from the trip that the *Weekly* was still publishing it a year later.

Following on from the success of the assignment to Darwin, Wep was next sent to New Guinea (Jan-Feb 1944), departing for Townsville January 9. Jess's father died five days later. Apart from again the many numerous cartoons and drawings, paintings and articles he provided, his illustrated letters home to Jess paint wonderful stories of the characters he met along the way and the feats of endurance they demonstrated, especially upon Shaggy Ridge. One cover he painted was of Victoria Cross winner, Sergeant T.C. (Diver) Derrick, V.C., D.C.M..⁹

Morotai (Jan-Feb 1945) and Borneo (Jul-Aug 1945) were to follow where he provided commentary and many pictures depicting everyday life for the troops, which were reproduced on the covers of *The Australian Women's Weekly* and within its pages. Two of his paintings won First Prize Awards for the Air and Medical sections of the *Australia at War* national exhibition¹⁰.

Following his trip to New Guinea in early 1944, Wep was formally employed on staff for a period of four years commencing from May 25, 1944,¹¹ possibly a move by Frank Packer to ensure Wep remained exclusive to Consolidated Press rather than being appointed an official War Artist. Les Tanner declared "he was without doubt Australia's most brilliant wartime cartoonist. He could draw anything, any way, a feat not often required in peace. His ability was recognized when he was sent as a war correspondent artist to

⁸ "I was angrily unhappy" W.E. Pidgeon, c.12 July 1943, Brisbane, William Edwin Pidgeon Archive

⁹ The Australian WOMEN'S WEEKLY (1944, May 13). The Australian Women's Weekly (1933 - 1982), p. Cover Page. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47489593>

¹⁰ 1945 First Prize, Australia At War Exhibition, The War in the Air Section 1944 – 1945 (*Interior, transport plane evacuating wounded*) and First Prize, Australia At War Exhibition, Medical Services Section 1944 – 1945 (*Advanced Dressing Station, Guy's Post*)

¹¹ Memorandum of Agreement between Consolidated Press Limited and William Edwin Pidgeon, 25 May 1944, William Edwin Pidgeon Archive

New Guinea where his drawings and paintings captured the sludge and agony of infantry fighting in a way not seen since Will Dyson.”¹² The bulk of Wep’s wartime archive was donated to the Australian War Memorial in 2014.

With guaranteed employment for at least the next four years, Bill purchased 85 Northwood Road in September 1944.¹³ He subsequently built a studio above the garage and connected to the house by a wooden bridge, established a pond, which became a haven for frogs in summer and enclosed the back verandah to create a sunroom, constructing a set of concrete steps leading down to the pond, proudly embellished with his nom-de-plume, “Wep.”

In addition to his illustration and war correspondent work for the ‘*Weekly*,’ Wep was also art critic for *The Daily Telegraph* for four years, 1944-1947. As art critic he met quite a considerable number of artists though only knew them very casually and was not strongly associated with them. Bill Dobell, whom he had known for many years having first met him at age 16 at Wunderlich’s in 1925. Upon Dobell’s return from Europe in 1939, Wep spent quite a few visits at Dobell’s home discussing his work along with various artists such as Jackie Baird and John Santry. When the litigation arose over Dobell’s 1943 Archibald Prize winning portrait of Joshua Smith, Wep recalled having a long discussion with Dobell about the pros and cons of this matter, and that he had the interesting job of doing a caricature of the courtroom scene which incorporated Dobell and Mr. Justice Roper, Sir Garfield Barwick, and seven other subsequent judges, as well as many of the artists, including Douglas Dundas, Mary Edwards and Joe Wilenski. Wep found it rather interesting to do caricatures of them in this dispute about what a caricature was and what it was not.

In total, Wep produced 70 cover illustrations for the ‘*Weekly*,’ only Boothroyd and Carl Shreve featured more from their domination during 1933-1940. Wep’s first cover appeared 27 August 1938, featuring his wife, Jess. His second cover, 3 February 1940, presented a relaxing beach scene but subsequent covers from 20 July 1940 through April 1946 concentrated on the war effort. He produced 29 covers during this period, all featuring the troops and their everyday life, bar one, a painting of his one-year old son, Graham, “Little Wep,” on the cover of the 21 July 1945 issue. From then until his resignation, his covers featured on a further nine issues.

During the 1950s the ‘*Weekly*’ moved more fully towards photographic covers, publishing only 48 covers painted by staff artists or contributors, 29 of which were painted by Wep. Of these, all but five were published in the first half of the decade.

In May 1955, Wep was informed by Editor-in-Chief, David McNicoll, that given Consolidated Press had three artists on staff, he was to be replaced as cartoonist for the *Sunday Telegraph* by a staff man, Les Tanner. Demand for ‘*Weekly*’ covers also dried up, with the ‘*Weekly*’ only publishing a further five painted covers in the following four years. The last three painted cover illustrations were all by Wep; “Saturday Night”, 20 June 1956, “Cup Parade”, 7 November 1956 and “Cup Day Melbourne 1959”, 4

¹² In memory of a great cartoonist by Les Tanner, *The Age*, 18 Feb 1981

¹³ Receipt of payment, 1 Sep 1944, William Edwin Pidgeon Archive

November 1959, his eighth Melbourne Cup cover. Les Tanner recalled Wep's covers "were incident-crammed, astutely observed, hilarious records of Australian life."¹⁴

Many of his *Australian Women's Weekly* covers have been treasured by people over the years. He would often receive letters years later from women and men of all walks of life expressing how much they enjoyed his work, both his covers for the *Weekly* and various cartoons in the *Telegraph*, often wanting reproductions; particularly of cherished iconic covers such as "Saturday Night Dance," "School Bus" or "Little Bush School." His cartoon of the 1944 Dobell Archibald Prize court trial was so popular the *Telegraph* re-ran it and sold limited edition reprints of it.

To Win an Archibald

Bill had been painting portraits and landscapes since age 16. One of his earliest portraits from that age is an excellent work of his grandfather, John White.

"I never had any real education in the application of oil paint techniques and that sort of thing, so what facility I may have acquired has been picked up mostly by experimentation in working for the colour magazines and newspaper illustrations."

Whilst Bill was known for and signed his newspaper and illustration work as 'Wep,' he preferred to be known as 'W.E. Pidgeon' and later, simply 'Pidgeon' for his paintings.

In 1949, as W.E. Pidgeon, Wep wrote an article for *Australian Artist* entitled "What price independence?" in which he discussed the pressures placed upon the cartoonist to toe a particular political line and how this can be broached with humour. He wrote, "The proper degree of independence of the cartoonist is complete independence - without it there is no passion, and without passion, no greatness. (In an effort to avoid the friction that striving after independence causes, the tendency today is to get closer and closer to a comic gag drawing on local and topical affairs.)" He felt English cartoonist Giles had mastered a technique of daily comment on affairs which obviated the necessity for politically slapping anyone on the back or in the face. He stated the masses for whom newspapers are produced much prefer to be titillated rather than prodded or lectured to. Satire proved a good medium, a technique Wep was well known for with his cartoon strip in the *Weekly*, "In and Out of Society," where the daily life of the people was reflected back to them in terms of gentle, even inane satire. Wep suggested a cartoonist must have a journalistic mind; an ability to pick out the key aspects of a story which will capture the audience's attention. Sometimes humour would lend itself more appropriately in generating interest for the masses.

By January 1949, with typical dry humour, Wep declared it was too long to have everything he did "wrapped up round the purchases from shops." His newspaper background had always kept him on a rather realistic viewpoint usually through his illustrations or caricatures. Most of the work he had to do involved human relationships. He had always been interested in human beings as such and enjoyed painting them.

¹⁴ In memory of a great cartoonist by Les Tanner, *The Age*, 18 Feb 1981

“The interest in human beings has naturally been conditioned by the fact that I used to do a cartoon every week, if not more. These cartoons always involved some political character or somebody else you'd do a caricature of, and although I prefer not too formal an approach to drawing in cartoons, I'd rather keep it expressionistic.”¹⁵

Consequently, he resigned from Consolidated Press to pursue his art interests with the aim to win an Archibald Prize, Australia's premier prize for portraiture established in 1921 from a bequest left by J.F. Archibald, a former editor of *The Bulletin* magazine, who died in 1919.

In a deal done with Frank Packer, to supplement his income until he could establish himself, Wep remained on retainer as an occasional contributor supplying covers for the 'Weekly' and cartoons for the *Sunday Telegraph*. Other income was obtained doing various book illustrations; covers for the *Australian Monthly A.M.* journal (1948-1951), the *Australian Journal* (1955-1956 - unsigned) and *Victa News* comic strip (1959-1969).

At the time of his resignation, Bill had already entered his first Archibald competition, in 1948, with a portrait of fellow journalist and artist, Frank Broadhurst. In 1949 he submitted a self-portrait and another of his friend and brain surgeon, Dr Gil Phillips. The self-portrait was acquired by Frank Packer and hung in his dining room.

Bill came close to claiming his first Archibald Prize in 1951 with a portrait of his wife, *Mrs W.E. Pidgeon* (Jessie Ann nee Graham). He was informed that his entry was within the first four. Tragedy struck months later when Jess fell ill in June 1952 with a brain tumour. She was hospitalized June 21. Her surgeon was their friend and previous subject of an Archibald entry, Dr Gil Phillips. Sadly, Gil was also seriously ill with cancer. Jess spent three weeks in hospital then Bill insisted on bringing her home to care for her there. Whilst Jess was in hospital, their close friend, Jimmy Bancks, creator of the comic strip *Ginger Meggs*, died suddenly on July 1. Shortly after bringing Jess home, Bill commenced a portrait in memory of their friend Jimmy. Jess died 22 September, ten days after Gil Phillips, leaving Bill to take care of their eight-year-old son, Graham.

Earlier that year Frank Packer held a dinner party where Jimmy Bancks had been a guest. Frank mentioned that Bill's self-portrait was too big for his dining room and he wanted to cut it down in size to make it fit better. Jimmy said that he simply could not do that and offered to swap the work with Frank for something more suitably sized. Jimmy then donated the portrait to the National Gallery of New South Wales (as it was known in 1952). As a result of that donation, Bill was invited by Hal Missingham, director of the gallery (and also a good friend of Bill's) to attend the gallery's Christmas function as was customary for all artists whose work had been acquired during the preceding year.¹⁶ It was at that party he met Miss Dorothy Lees, Coordinator for Travelling Art Shows at the Gallery. Romance struck and Dorothy subsequently became the subject of Bill's 1953 entry. They were married in November 1954.

In the 1955 Archibald, Bill again missed out winning with his portrait, *Miss Whiteley*, Brett Whiteley's sister, Wendy, or as she is more commonly known, Frannie. Frannie Hopkirk

¹⁵ Pidgeon, William Edwin & De Berg, Hazel, 1913-1984. (Interviewer) (1965). *William Edwin Pidgeon interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection.*

¹⁶ Dorothy Pidgeon (nee Lees), personal recollections

wrote in her book, *Brett*, that this portrait was the judges' choice however Bill was denied the prize because she was not a subject of a "distinguished person of arts or letters." The picture however was subsequently purchased by the National Gallery of New South Wales immediately following the exhibition.

In 1956 Bill was invited as a guest of the government of the People's Republic of Romania to visit their country and attend the National Arts and Cultural Conference in Bucharest on a cultural exchange. At the same time, he took the opportunity to visit Rome, Venice, Munich, Paris and London to personally experience many of the works by the great masters he admired. This invitation behind the 'Iron Curtain' subsequently brought him to the attention of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) between the years 1956 to 1959. Wep along with many other associates in the arts and culture arena such as Dame Mary Gilmore, Lloyd Rees, Judith Wright, Clem and Nina Christesen, Professor Manning Clark, Frank Hardy, William Frater, Arthur Boyd and Alan Marshall were all under suspicion for their potential communist leanings as a result of their involvement with the Australian Peace Council and associated peace summits.

Shortly before Bill's trip to Romania in 1956, he was diagnosed with glaucoma in both eyes. He wrote home during his trip of the difficulty he was having with his eyes following applications of drops, leaving him unable to see clearly for at least an hour afterwards. Contained within his Romanian papers is a handwritten note; "My eyes are troubling me very much." His condition remained a closely held secret between only himself and wife, Dorothy as it would have crippled his ability to obtain portrait commissions if his deteriorating sight had become general knowledge.

Bill's first Archibald success finally came after ten years in 1958 (£700 prizemoney) with a portrait of his friend and fellow journalist, Ray Walker, President of the Journalists' Club, Sydney; celebrating that win with the birth of his second son, Peter. Gladys Archibald, niece of J.F. Archibald who had bequeathed the prizemoney, wrote to Bill expressing her pleasure over his win.¹⁷

"Just to congratulate you on winning this year's Archibald prize and to say how pleased I am the monopoly has at last been broken. I am quite sure it was never intended by my uncle as a steady income for an established artist but to encourage art by helping the artist as he helped so many people during his lifetime."

"Also the journalistic connection, would I am quite sure have pleased my uncle greatly."

Bill subsequently went on to win the Archibald Prize again in 1961 (£750) with a portrait of Rabbi Dr Israel Porush of the Great Synagogue, Sydney.

When the Trustees failed to make an award for the 1964 Archibald Prize, Bill commented on their indecisiveness with overtones referencing back to the 1943 Award drama over Dobell's portrait of Joshua Smith.

¹⁷ Archibald, G., Letter to W.E. Pidgeon, December 17, 1958

"I don't believe the standard of work of all artists who usually exhibit in the Archibald could drop so collectively. The failure to award a prize suggests indecision on behalf of the Trustees as to whether to go avant garde or stay traditionalist. The meaning of the term portrait seems to have become again a matter of controversy."

In 1963, Bill, along with fellow artists, Lloyd Rees, Reinis Zusters and Guy Warren founded the Lane Cove Art Panel with Lawrence Willetts as Secretary. The panel acted as selection committee and arranged up to six exhibitions a year of various artists on behalf of Council in support of a permanent changing exhibition of Australian art.

At the suggestion of Lawrie Willetts in March 1968, Lane Cove Council requested Pidgeon to paint a portrait of Dr. Lloyd Rees for the Council's art collection. The portrait was almost complete when Lloyd requested Bill paint him in his favourite velveteen coat, which he had purchased in Paris. Rather than paint over the canvas, Bill painted an alternative portrait, which was subsequently entered in the 1968 Archibald Prize and won; Pidgeon's third Archibald Prize (\$1,850). Interestingly, Bill always preferred the original version with Lloyd dressed more as the artist at work in his paint smock, brushes in hand, the winning version being somewhat contrived in Lloyd's appearance, dressed in tie, waist coat and jacket whilst retaining the brushes in his hand.

Bill was frequently asked to review the work of young budding artists. In the mid-1950s a friend of Bill's asked him to look at the work of the son of a friend. That lad was a young 14½ year old schoolboy, Brett Whiteley. When Bill returned home, he pronounced Brett was the most natural talent he had ever seen – and he hoped he would not burn it out. From then on, they were firm friends. Over the next few years, Bill aided and encouraged Brett, convincing his parents, Clem and Beryl, despite Beryl's wish he not become an artist, to let him have a go and apply for a travelling scholarship to Europe, for which he was successful.

When Brett and his family returned from overseas in 1969, their friendship and collaboration reignited, Brett being a constant visitor to Bill's Northwood home. At the most unexpected times, day, or night he would appear on the doorstep – front or back – and was always made welcome.

One night in early 1970 Bill had retired early, frustrated, and despondent about his eyes. Later, when Dorothy was about to put the light out, Brett accompanied by Tony Woods, both very bright, arrived at the front door with a bottle of Ouzo. Bill got up and they all sat around the dining room table, the three of them madly talking weighty matters on art, going right through to morning.

Bill had cheered and Dorothy asked Brett if he would sit for Bill for a portrait for the Archibald. From then it was on – Brett would do one of Bill, Tony not to be left out declared he must be in it too.

Neither Brett nor Tony would heed Dorothy's advice when she kept assuring them, stemming from five years' experience at the Gallery, that it could not possibly be

accepted as it would not comply with the conditions of the competition. Nonsense! They would carry all before them, Dorothy recalled.¹⁸

The joint entry, *Linked Portrait* (a triptych of a portrait of Brett Whiteley by Pidgeon and a caricature portrait of Bill Pidgeon by Whiteley, painting each other, accompanied by a self-portrait sketch by Tony Woods and a fourth panel of notes by the artists) was submitted on the final day for entries, December 31, 1970, and was subsequently rejected as deemed not complying with the rules of competition. Though the rules at the time did not specifically rule out joint entries, the entry form did not accommodate them either.

Pidgeon's final entry into the Archibald (1972), *Venita*, was of fellow artist and close friend, Venita Salnajs Zusters. His last commissioned portrait, completed February 1973, was of Mr. Alton James Greenhalgh, Principal, William Batman Teachers College, Balmain, N.S.W.

Pidgeon entered the Archibald Prize competition 24 times from 1948 through 1972 inclusive except for 1965 and 1971. He won the competition three times (1958, 1961 and 1968) and was a finalist every time with a total of 37 portraits. Coincidentally, in both years Pidgeon did not enter, the prize was taken out by fellow trifecta winner of the prize, Clifton Pugh.

Always an early riser Bill liked to start work around 4am. He appreciated the quiet and stillness of the new day as well as the quality of light. With ever worsening eyesight and sensitivity to bright light having undergone several operations already, the midday and afternoon sun presented too much glare for him to work. After undertaking four or five hours work in the morning, with a book in hand, he would often head up by car or bus to the Longueville Hotel around 10 a.m., where he would sit with a schooner and read books on poetry, religion or philosophy and observe the patrons, making rough sketches and notes with ideas for cartoons on whatever piece of paper was at hand, often simply the inside covers or pages of the book he was reading.

During his portrait painting career, Pidgeon underwent numerous eye operations to treat his glaucoma, cataracts and replace his lenses. Virtually blind in his left eye from the glaucoma, and with the condition advancing rapidly in his right eye, a sixth operation was undertaken in April 1973 to implant an artificial lens. Shortly afterwards he accidentally poked his finger in his eye resulting in an emergency operation to correct the damage. This ultimately proved unsuccessful, leaving him unable to either read or paint and struggling financially without an income.

Life After Portraiture

In 1974, King Watson, Bill's close friend of almost 40 years and editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, persuaded him to return for several months to do the political cartoon (as Wep) for the *Sunday Telegraph* whilst their regular cartoonist was on long service leave, as well as art critic (as W.E. Pidgeon) for the paper. With the cartoon work ceasing in early 1975, each week Bill would continue do the rounds of the galleries in Paddington

¹⁸ Letter, Dorothy Pidgeon to James Mollison, Director National Gallery of Australia, 21 Nov 1974; William Edwin Pidgeon Archives

and elsewhere, accompanied by wife, Dorothy, magnifying glass in hand to view the current exhibitions. He would then painstakingly write up his reviews by hand, which Dorothy would type and then submit to the paper. This process was enacted, every week for the following five years without any break or remuneration increase. He did not do it for the money – that was never his motivation. He did it because he embraced all things about art and he loved fostering the talent of new and young artists as he had always done in the past with the likes of people such as Peter Harrigan, Les Tanner and Brett Whiteley.

Bill often received letters from artists he had reviewed thanking him for his insight. Bryan Westwood wrote in October 1975, "Thank you very much for your most kindly review of my paintings at the Bonython recently. I saw you briefly at the opening on the Thursday night but you were obviously about your work, so I tried not to catch your eye or interrupt you. Thank you for your kindness and generosity." George McIvar wrote in 1977, "It is a great pleasure to get a good criticism written from a point of view and by a critic you respect." But it was not always so.

Back in the 1940s as the art critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, both the Royal Art Society and the Australian Art Society wrote to the paper requesting Wep not be sent to review their shows.^{19 20} They felt he was giving them unfair criticism. Wep's response was that those complaining were not innovators, nor were they misunderstood, they simply did not have it; the relationships of form and line, tone and colour.²¹ He felt he was entitled to be critical of the works of uninspired or unsophisticated artists who simply made a realistic transcription of what they see and like in the world around them. His opinion was the society shows "revolve round the works of a dozen regular exhibitors. Apart from these, most of the paintings are the products of the dilettante or the amateur."²² Members of the public wrote to the paper in support of Wep. Arnold Zimmerman, himself a member of the RAS, wrote saying the ban was "unfortunate for the RAS as Wep is the most sincere and constructive art critic in Sydney."²³ Another, from Dora Chapman, Secretary of the Studio of Realistic Art who wrote, "we congratulate you on possessing an art critic who is well informed, sincere, constructive, and knows how to put his ideas across."²⁴ Of course, there were many good reviews as well; of artists such as Lionel Lindsay, Lloyd Rees, Roland Wakelin, Bill Dobell, Margaret Preston and Sali Herman to name a few; some not always favourable but always fair and constructive.

An excellent descriptive writer, Bill could literally paint a picture with words alone. He was well respected as an art critic who wrote unpretentious reviews that were easily understood by the reader and well appreciated by the artists. His review of friend and local resident, Lloyd Rees, was treasured by Lloyd who when it was published dropped in with an autograph book, claiming it was the best review he had ever received.

¹⁹ Royal Art Society (1945, April 24). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 8. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248008463>

²⁰ Criticism Unfair (1945, May 22). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 8. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248012644>

²¹ WEP answers Sydney art groups who banned him (1945, May 26). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 13. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248007106>

²² Art Society Exhibition (1946, June 18). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 12. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248500167>

²³ Royal Art Society (1945, May 1). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 8. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248006493>

²⁴ Wep praised (1945, May 31). *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1931 - 1954), p. 12. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248007408>

For relaxation Bill enjoyed doing the occasional landscape and sometimes experimenting with abstractionism, wooden sculpture, and ceramic pottery. It helped him escape the literalities demanded of mostly commissioned portraits. In an interview on ABC Radio in 1969²⁵ following his third Archibald win, Bill said:

"I sometimes get a little tired of doing portraits. At least, I always like starting a new one; finishing them is much harder – another matter altogether. There are times when I like to give up portraits for a while and try other kinds of painting."

"I enjoy doing abstracts, but the thing I really prefer most of all is landscapes. And, of course, this means Australian landscapes. You hear people say that the Australian countryside is colourless. They must be blind. It has a subtle, opalescent quality about it – almost pearl-like. It's fashionable to go out into the Centre and paint the landscape there these days, which is all fiery red and dramatic. I've never been there myself, and if I ever do go, I think it'll probably just be to look, not to paint. My favourite countryside is the Western Slopes of New South Wales, and the mountains. I really don't like the sea. But those long mountain slopes, I really love that part of the country. And I've done quite a lot of straight-out landscapes and free interpretations of landscape, which I do at home from notes and sketches that I've done on various trips to the country, or maybe just from recollection. I really love Australia. About ten years ago [1956], I was over in Europe for a while; and most of the country there struck me as being a bit weak and flabby – that's apart from the Alps, naturally. It wasn't really landscape at all; it was more like a park, which is all very well in its own way, but it hasn't really got anything very much for me. Not like the Australian landscape, which is hard and has some guts to it. Of course, it's all very pleasant sitting out in the soft European countryside on the soft grass, or the fragrant pine-needles. But in more ways than one, the Australian needs the broken sticks and the bull-ants, too."

Apart from painting landscapes, Bill was also an avid reader with an extensive personal library of more than 1,600 books; books on art and various artists; ceramics and comparative religion. Though a professed atheist, Bill's library included many books on Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam; Guerdjieff, philosophy, psychology, self-reflection, etc. He also made extensive use of public libraries.

Bill also enjoyed writing poetry, especially in his later years when unable to paint. Much of his poetry was devoted to the loves of his life; Jess the first of his three loves, along with Dorothy and Paris based Australian journalist, Margaret Murray (though never a lover) whom he had met in Paris in 1956 where she was working for his friend, Roley Pullen, another Australian journalist. All three provided different facets of support for him in various life stages but Jess was the unmistakable love of his youth.

In 1979, whilst trimming bushes on a step ladder in the laneway beside his home, Bill was knocked down by a neighbour's car leaving him unable to continue doing art reviews for the *Sunday Telegraph*. His health deteriorated from that point onward.

Bill died February 16, 1981 at the Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards, N.S.W. following a fall as a patient at Longueville Private Hospital. He was cremated at a service

²⁵ GUEST OF HONOUR, Mr. William Edwin Pidgeon, Broadcast: Radio 2FC, 7:15pm, 19 January 1969

held at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium, N.S.W, February 19, 1981. Brett Whiteley, Bill's young golden boy from the 1950s, usually always a vision dressed in white with golden curls - "If ever golden curls could tarnish"²⁶, stood front and centre, fully clothed in black, a single red rose in his hands - and bid Bill farewell.

Bill's ashes were scattered amongst those of his first wife Jess beside the frog pond he built in the backyard of his home at 85 Northwood Road, a white Azalea, his simple headstone. All now obliterated by the bulldozer and a 21st century lust for a McMansion lifestyle.

Influences and Style

In his earlier years, Wep's greatest influences were British humorous artist and cartoonist, Henry Mayo Bateman, for his simplicity and expressionism, Mexican painter, caricaturist and illustrator, Miguel Covarrubias for his design and formalism and U.S. cartoonist, Peter Arno for his immediacy. He was much interested in Picasso and the modern artists, Cezanne, Gauguin, Toulouse Lautrec, Bruegel, Renoir, Matisse, Van Gogh etc. and from about 1928 onwards gained any knowledge he later required from books out of the Public Libraries.

In 1964 when reflecting on his earlier days, Wep wrote:

"I was quite eclectic but could never get any real feeling for tone – I suppose my High School training in architectural and mechanical draughtsmanship tended to make me more diagrammatic and explanatory at the sacrifice of atmosphere and solidity."

"To me, people became symbols of a myriad moods and relationships rather than potential actualities – I preferred the generic to the particular. Most of the best black and white at that period had a particularization of individuality I admired but not emulate. There was a great deal of distinction between the artists' styles, something which seems to be lacking today. At present there is too much reliance on the gag line – too much abstraction in the drawing, too many formulas, not enough humanity."

In his sketches and cartoons, Wep demonstrated great skill with an amazing economy or simplicity of line. Wep was a pioneer of modern-day cartoonists. In 1966, George Blaikie wrote in his book *Remember Smith's Weekly*²⁷ that 'In and Out of Society' had "a style so refreshingly comic and original, so modern in approach that Wep influenced the work of many of today's humorous artists in the way that Phil May did with his approach to style at the end of the last century." He further said, "Wep, with his stylistic drawings of extraordinary zest and movement, broke away entirely from the tradition of tonal draughtsmanship, although his is a style that is in lineal descent from that of Phil May. Modern, fresh, and entirely original, Wep's two-dimensional caricature was a precedent for a new departure in comic-art genre, an approach that now dominates this field of Australian journalism."

²⁶ "For young Brett", W.E. Pidgeon, c.1964, William Edwin Pidgeon Archives

²⁷ Blaikie, George (1966). *Remember Smith's Weekly? : a biography of an uninhibited national Australian newspaper, born: 1 March 1919, died: 28 October 1950*. Rigby, Adelaide

His paintings present similarly an appreciation for subtlety of tone, colour and light, capturing much detail within the viewer's eye without need for realistic reproduction. Hal Missingham in his introduction to the catalogue of the 1988 exhibition of Bill's war paintings wrote that his paintings had "an unmistakable Australian feeling of casualness."²⁸ He dealt with the ordinary and the mundaneness of everyday life to which people could relate. He provided an insight into what their sons, fathers and daughters were experiencing, the better and more positive aspects of their everyday lives in these various fields of war.

Bill also had a keen interest in Eastern art particularly Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese and Japanese, a favourite being the Japanese artist, Hokusai as well as the classic masters such as Leonardo da Vinci, Rubens and Rembrandt. When he visited Europe in 1956, he sought out works by Tintoretto and Utrillo, El Greco, Titian, Holbein, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Goya, Giotto, Van der Weyden, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Raphael. His favourite portrait artist was Hans Holbein.

"To me, the greatest portrait painter of them all is Holbein – or at least one of the greatest; he does an objective picture of the person which is also invariably a beautiful piece of art as well. Other painters have got more and more subjective about their sitters, till in the end the picture tells you more and more about the artist and less about the man he's painting. And when you get to the semi-abstract portraits, I think you find very few indeed that fulfil the basic function of telling you something at least about the sitter. Only a great artist like Picasso can get away with it; nobody I know can compete with him in things like his semi-abstract portrait of people like his friend Sabartés, the poet."²⁹

Portraiture

Not only was Pidgeon able to readily portray a subject's likeness, but his portraits demonstrate his skill in capturing their true character as well. When asked by Sheila Patrick in August 1962 for *Vogue* magazine to define a portrait, Bill advised:

"A portrait does not compete with a photograph, although I think it should be primarily objective. That is to say it should tell you more about the sitter than the artist. The good portrait has movement in repose and is a subtle amalgam of varying aspects of the sitter. It has mobility, and a synthesis of vision which is denied to the camera."

According to Bill, the most important aspects of a painting are its design; being the relationship between form and line, as well as the treatment of colour and tone and with his background in newspaper work and cartoons, "the added values of understanding, intensity of feeling and nobleness of mind," which he said, "can transmute the diagrammatic structure into art of great profundity."

In terms of portraiture Bill believed the key elements were likeness, design, humanity and understanding the sitter's character. Of course, with commissioned works he also had to address other outside influences such as the opinions of those who gave the

²⁸ W.E. Pidgeon: War Paintings 1943 – 1945, catalogue by Lin Bloomfield, foreword by Hal Missingham. Paddington, N.S.W., Australia : Bloomfield Galleries, [1988].

²⁹ GUEST OF HONOUR, Mr. William Edwin Pidgeon, Broadcast: Radio 2FC, 7:15pm, 19 January 1969

commission and the sitter's family and friends who did not always know what was best. Often, he would leave the hands till last as initially a sitter will present as tense and only after a period of time would they relax and hold their hands in a more natural state.

In an interview with Hazel de Berg in 1965³⁰ when asked about his approach, Bill said:

"It takes me quite a long time to pose them to what I think mostly looks like themselves. It's rather difficult. I find that nobody knows what to do and I don't know the people well enough, and they are self-conscious, so that by the time you settle down to find a pose, and seek to generally observe how these people look, maybe an hour or so has gone.

Well, I like to do then this sketch drawing and brush in the hands and the body, and call that a day for the first sitting.

Subsequent to that, I measure it over and scale it up, if it is to be 24 by 30 [inches] or 36 by 28, well, you get some idea as to where to chop the composition, and then I square it up on the canvas, and next time the sitter comes I start painting, and I usually work from the sitter from then on.

I probably find that from the past, where I've done so many years of caricature, I tend to react slightly the other way. I think that fundamentally I could well afford to use more of the element of caricature in what I'm doing, but there again, the thing still has to be some sort of synthesis. If you just paint them where the light happens to be falling on them it may look like them in a certain aspect, but if their hair is light and the light is in a different direction, it makes it look dark, so you have to make your modifications.

Sometimes the sitters may have the false look and you just wait till they wear out and they get somewhere near their real look, and it takes time because until they become themselves it's very difficult to say which way they hold their mouth or, and maybe, after about two or three sittings, you come to the conclusion you should have started them from another angle. However, if you don't let them know and you do that again, it's all right, but otherwise they get very despondent."

Despite a gregarious nature, Pidgeon was humble to the extreme when it came to his own art and the business of marketing and sales, more often deferring to Dorothy to deal with it. Unlike many modern artists, he was not a businessman and would often succumb to a new portrait when a sitter or their minders had a change of perspective rather than renegotiate the commission. He did not amass a large body of work or sell it, other than what was commissioned but happily gave works away to friends, acquaintances and even strangers who may have expressed pleasure in a particular piece. He was very generous in that aspect. Aside from commission jobs, he only painted for relaxation. He never held a solo show, only entering group exhibitions or competitions to practice his art. Consequently, there are few works in circulation or art auction sales databases, a significant number remaining within his personal archive. However, Pidgeon's work was

³⁰ Pidgeon, William Edwin & De Berg, Hazel, 1913-1984. (Interviewer) (1965). *William Edwin Pidgeon interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection, National Library of Australia.*

represented in many private and government institutions throughout Australia and in many private homes stashed away in cupboards on ageing newsprint.

Group Exhibitions and Art Competitions

- 1938 *Fifteen Group of Independent Painters*, Farmer's Blaxland Galleries, 7 Oct 1938 (<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article247365576>, 1938)
- 1940 *Fifteen Group of Independent Painters*, Farmer's Blaxland Galleries, 5 Nov 1940 (*Geoffrey Cumine*)
- 1941 *War Cartoons and Caricatures of the British Commonwealth*, National Gallery of Canada 1941, Ottawa, (*NOT WHAT HE WANTED*, Sunday Telegraph, Sydney, December 22, 1940 illustrated in catalogue; *WHITE-WASH*, Sunday Telegraph, Sydney, February 23, 1941; *PIED PIPER*, Sunday Telegraph, Sydney, May 18, 1941)
- 1942 *Cartoon and Comedy*, David Jones Auditorium
- 1945 *Australia at War* touring exhibition (*Interior, transport plane evacuating wounded; Advanced Dressing Station; Operation – Guy's Post, New Guinea*)
- 1946 Studio of Realist Art Exhibition, David Jones Art Gallery
- 1948 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*F. J. Broadhurst*)
- 1949 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Self-portrait and Dr. Gilbert Phillips*)
- 1950 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*The Right Hon. R. G. Menzies, C.H., K.C., M.P. and Kenneth Slessor*)
- 1951 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Mrs. W. E. Pidgeon and Arthur Mailey*)
- 1952 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*The Hon. Mr. Justice Kirby and Ald. E. C. O'Dea, The Right Hon. The Lord Mayor of Sydney*)
- 1953 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Miss Dorothy Lees and The Late Captain W. G. Lawrence*)
- 1953 Wynne Prize (*Goat Island and Murrurundi*)
- 1954 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*J. E. Cassidy, Q.C.*)
- 1954 Wynne Prize (*New England Highway, Wingen*)
- 1954 Exhibition of Newspaper and Magazine Art, David Jones Art Gallery
- 1954 Artists – by Artists, National Art Gallery of New South Wales (*Self-portrait*)
- 1955 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Miss Whiteley*)
- 1955 The Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize for 1955 (*Dorothy Pidgeon*)
- 1956 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Mr. Ben Freshwater*)
- 1956 The Sir John Sulman Prize (*The Sun Bathers*)
- 1956 The Second Rockdale Annual Art Award, 1956, Highly Commended Painting in Oils, (*Old Cooks River Bridge*)
- 1956 The Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize for 1956 (*Wendy Whiteley*)
- 1957 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*The Right Rev WG Hilliard, MA, Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Sydney and Mr WA O'Callaghan*)
- 1957 The Sir John Sulman Prize (*The Bathers and The Galvanisers*)
- 1957 Wynne Prize (*Sussex Street*)
- 1957 Our Changing Cities, Caltex Art Prize (*Our Changing Cities*)
- 1957 The Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize for 1957 (*Diana Judah and Dorothy*)
- 1958 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Mr. Ray Walker and Mr. L. J. Thompson*)
- 1958 Wynne Prize (*Hills at Wingen*)
- 1958 Co-judge for the 1958 Journalists' Club Award in the field of the liberal arts.
- 1958 The Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize for 1958 (*Liz and Hazel*)
- 1958 Recent Australian Paintings, Farmers Blaxland Gallery (*Liverpool Ranges and Girl with Flaxen Hair*)
- 1958 Blake Prize 1958 art competition (*Christ and Gethsemane*)

- 1959 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Sir Edward Hallstrom and H. B. Newman, Esq.*)
- 1959 Tom Roberts to Jon Molvig, a retrospective Australian Collection, Rudy Komon Art Gallery (*The Waif*)
- 1959 Third Tasmanian Art Gallery Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (*Auiud Rumania*)
- 1959 Australian Landscape Exhibition, Farmer's Blaxland Galleries (*Upper Hunter*)
- 1959 Matson Lines Exhibition of Australian Art, an exhibition of one work each from 50 prominent Australian artists to leave for San Francisco and Los Angeles on 7 Nov and also to be displayed in transit aboard the Monterey and Mariposa ships (*Diana Judah*)
- 1960 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*The Hon. Sir Edward Warren and William Dobell*)
- 1960 Co-judge for Journalists' Club Art competition
- 1961 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush and Kenneth Slessor*)
- 1961 Blake Prize 1961 Exhibition (*St. John preaching the Logos*)
- 1961 Fifth Tasmanian Art Gallery Exhibition (*Customs House Newcastle*)
- 1962 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*H.L. Wheeler and The Hon Mr Justice Clancy, Chancellor of the University of NSW*)
- 1962 Sixth Tasmanian Art Gallery Exhibition, Hobart (*Pipers Gap*)
- 1963 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*The Chancellor of the University of New England, P. A. Wright, CMG DSC*)
- 1963 Exhibition of Paintings by William Dargie, William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, George Finey and William Pidgeon; Journalists' Club Gallery (*Urana, Mount Wingen, Near Scone, Pacific Highway, "Auiud" Rumania, Young Boy, Ray Walker, King Watson, Porto Bello Road and Pont Saint Michel*)
- 1964 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Emeritus Professor AJ Arnott*)
- 1964 Fifty Years of Australian Cartooning, August 1964, Black and White Exhibition, Journalists' Club of Sydney. ("Cartoonist, illustrator, caricaturist, painter; one of Australia's outstanding artists in many mediums")
- 1966 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Professor Sir Philip Baxter, KBE, PhD and Mrs. W. Bunning*)
- 1966 Wynne Prize (*Aftermath*)
- 1967 Archibald Prize for portraiture; (*Dr. J. R. Vickery, O.B.E.*)
- 1967 Wynne Prize (*Forest Remnants*)
- 1968 Archibald Prize for portraiture; (*Dr. Lloyd Rees and Mr. F. J. Carberry*)
- 1968 The Sir John Sulman Prize (*The Fall*)
- 1968 Flotta Lauro Art Prize Competition, exhibited at Myer's Melbourne 28 October to 2 November 1968 (*Terra emergent*)
- 1969 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Dorothy Pidgeon and Mr. R. G. C. Parry Okeden, CMG, CBE.*)
- 1969 Art Gallery of South Australia, selection of entries from the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prize competitions (*Dr Lloyd Rees*)
- 1970 Archibald Prize for portraiture; (*Professor J.J. Auchmuty, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle*)
- 1971 The Harald Szeemann Selection, Bonython Gallery, Sydney and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; *Linked Portrait* (trypich conducted with Brett Whiteley and Tony Woods). This portrait was also entered in the 1970 Archibald Prize but rejected.
- 1971 St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney 150 Years' Celebrations Religious Art Prize November, 1971 (*The Washing of Feet*)
- 1972 Archibald Prize for portraiture; (*Venita*)
- 1972 The Sir John Sulman Prize (*Bush Picnic*)

- 1973 S.C.E.G.S. Association Art Show (*Kittyhawks at Noemfoor Island and Paul*)
 1975 S.C.E.G.S. Association Art Show (*The Right Hon. R. G. Menzies, C.H., K.C., M.P.; Venita; Three Punters – Philip Street Hotel and Mount Wingen*)

Group Exhibitions (Posthumous)

- 1988 *The Artist and Lane Cove, Past, Present and Future*; (selection of *Wireless Weekly* and *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine covers, *Aftermath*, *Portrait of Lloyd Rees* and *Linked Portrait* done in conjunction with Brett Whiteley and Tony Woods)
 1988 *Send Me More Paint! Australian art during the second world war*. Australian War Memorial travelling exhibition. (*Barber's shop in a forward area* 1944)
 1991 *Law Suits* exhibition (Aug-Dec), Hyde Park Barracks; 5 oil paintings plus 11 pencil sketches from 1944 Dobell court case
 1999 *Artists and Cartoonists in Black and White*, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
 2011 *Landmarks; Creating a Country*, Flemington Racecourse exhibit (permanent ongoing), National Museum of Australia, (a selection of *Australian Women's Weekly* magazines featuring WEP covers)

Solo Exhibitions (Posthumous)

- 1988 *War Paintings 1943 – 1945*; the Bloomfield Galleries, Paddington, NSW
 2012 *William Edwin Pidgeon (1909 – 1981) Retrospective*; Artarmon Galleries, Artarmon, NSW
 2015 *William Edwin Pidgeon (1909–1981), war correspondent and artist*; Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ACT

Awards

- 1924 O.G.U. Prize for Drawing
 1945 First Prize, *Australia At War* Exhibition, *The War in the Air* Section 1944 – 1945 (*Interior, transport plane evacuating wounded*)
 1945 First Prize, *Australia At War* Exhibition, *Medical Services* Section 1944 – 1945 (*Advanced Dressing Station, Guy's Post*)
 1945 Honourable Mention, *Australia At War* Exhibition, *Medical Services* Section 1944 – 1945 (*Operation – Guy's Post, New Guinea*)
 1956 *The Second Rockdale Annual Art Award, 1956*, Highly Commended, Painting in Oils (*Old Cooks River Bridge*)
 1957 Industrial Art, Royal Adelaide Exhibition
 1958 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Mr. Ray Walker*)
 1961 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush*)
 1968 Archibald Prize for portraiture (*Dr. Lloyd Rees*)

Books Illustrated

- *Trio* (Limited Edition, 75 copies, Sunnybrook Press, 1931)
- *Rhymes of Sydney* (Colin Wills, 1933)
- *Eureka Stockade* (Raffaello Carboni, 150 copy limited edition printed by Ernest Shea, Sunnybrook Press 1937-1943)

- *Come Away Pearler* (Colin Simpson, 1952)
- *Here's Luck* (Lennie Lower, new edition 1955/57)
- *They're A Weird Mob* (Nino Cullotta, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1957, 1961)
- *No Glamour In Gumboots* (Marian Warren, 1958)
- *The Burnt Offering: How Not To Barbecue* (Winsom A Gilbert, 1958)
- *Cop This Lot* (Nino Cullotta, 1960)
- *The Christian Gentleman* (G C Davey, 1960)
- *No Kava for Johnny* (John O'Grady, 1961)
- *So, You Want to Buy A House* (Cyril Pearl, Chesire, Melbourne, 1961)
- *Gone Fishin'* (Nino Cullotta, 1962)
- *The Best of Lennie Lower* (Cyril Pearl and WEP, 1963)
- *Aussie English* (John O'Grady, 1965)
- *OGF* (Keith Smith, 1965)
- *The Things They Do to You* (John O'Grady, 1965)

Collections

- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
- Australian War Memorial, Canberra
- Children's Hospital, Sydney
- City Tattersall's Club, Sydney
- Government House, Sydney
- Great Synagogue, Sydney (1961 Archibald Prize portrait of Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush)
- Journalists' Club (now defunct including 1958 Archibald Prize portrait of Ray Walker [stolen/missing])
- Lane Cove Town Hall (1968 Archibald Prize portrait of Dr Lloyd Rees)
- Law Courts, Sydney
- Newcastle City Art Gallery
- Parliament House, Canberra (Sir William Aston, Speaker and the late Rt. Hon. H.E. Holt, Prime Minister)
- Parliament House, Sydney
- Royal Prince Alfred Hospital
- Supreme Court, Sydney
- Sydney Teachers' College
- Trinity Grammar School
- University of N.S.W.
- University of New England
- University of Newcastle
- University of Sydney
- Numerous other business and private collections throughout Australia