

The Harbeck Collection of *Australian Motoring in Print* - Part 2

“The open road and no speed limit” – Australia’s first motoring novel



The open road and no speed limit.

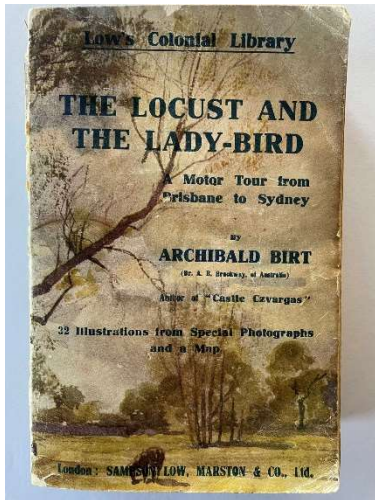
Ever wondered what a Brisbane medical doctor got up to in his spare time in the first decade of the 1900s? Quite a lot, as it turns out.

Born in South Africa in 1862 Archibald Birt Brockway qualified as a registered medical practitioner in London in 1889. That same year he married Ellen Marie Dennis and the young couple migrated to Queensland. After stints at the Muttaborra and Southport Hospitals the Brockways and their two young daughters took up residence in Brisbane in 1900, where Brockway set up practice and became Visiting Physician at the Brisbane Hospital. So far, so dull.

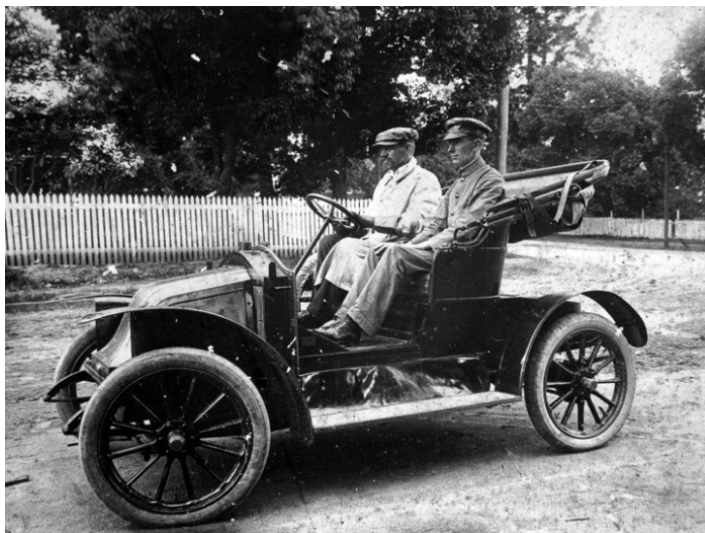
Once ensconced in the family’s new home *Thrums* on Wickham Terrace, however, Brockway became involved in a very large number of activities around town. Among many other things he took on the administration and promotion of amateur sports, including swimming, rugby, and athletics.

Of most interest to the automotive historian, however, is the fact that in 1905 Brockway was not only one of the founding members of the Automobile Club of Queensland (now RACQ), but is believed to have been responsible for calling the first meeting. Finally, he also found the time to pen what is almost certainly *Australia’s first motoring novel* - unusually illustrated with 32 photographs, most of which had been taken by Brockway himself.

The Locust and the Ladybird, written under the pen-name *Archibald Birt*, was published by Sampson Low, Marston & Co. in London in 1911. The title of the book is a reference to the names given to the two cars that feature most prominently in the story. The book was issued in a hardcover cloth binding with an image of a car stamped in gilt on the front cover. As was common practice, a Colonial Issue was also published. This publication differs from the London issue in that it was published in illustrated softcovers with the additional title *A Motor tour from Brisbane to Sydney* on the front cover.



The novel takes the form of fictitious letters between Aston Perry of Brisbane and his sister Amy Chapman in England. Perry's letters describe the adventures and mishaps, and the ensuing romance, during a motor trip from Tweed Heads to Sydney. As reviewers in the Brisbane newspapers at the time pointed out, the book mixes fact and fiction and some of the events related were almost certainly based on Brockway's personal experience.



Doctor Archibald Brockway in a Renault roadster AX, ca. 1908, State Library of Queensland

By the time the book was published in 1911 Brockway had owned at least four cars and made two trips to Sydney. The car Brockway drove at the ACQ's first 'run' on 17 June 1905 had been a 8hp Glide. He then owned a 10hp Adams-Hewitt. In January 1908 the *Saturday Observer* reported that Brockway had taken delivery of a 10hp De Dion. Within a month he is said to have driven it to Sydney. The State Library of Queensland holds a ca. 1908 photograph showing Dr Brockway and his chauffeur Mr Jeffs in a Renault AX, but it is unclear

whether the car was his.

The car that features in some of the photographs in *The Locust and the Ladybird*, appears to be Brockway's new 16hp Humber. The *Queenslander* reported on 29 October 1910 that Brockway and his chauffeur, with passengers Mr and Mrs Alec Dodwell and their two children as well as a nurse had made the inland journey to Sydney, and then on to Mount Kosciusko! For the return journey they used the coastal route, the entire trip lasting 30 days.

Further reading:

Queensland's Motoring Dawn. By Richard McDonough. Salisbury, Boolarong Press, 2015

The Life and Times of Dr Brockway and the Brockway Cup. By Jean Stewart. Kenmore, J and D Stewart, 2007.