During his lifetime James Pinkerton Campbell was a committed amateur and professional photographer. His career as a photographer can be divided broadly into four interlinked phases: landscape photographer; official Commonwealth Government photographer and cinematographer; war photographer (both officially and unofficially); and industrial photographer. He made a significant national contribution in his chosen art field over all these areas of activity.

Although born in South Yarra, a suburb of Melbourne, Campbell grew up in and around small rural towns in Gippsland, Victoria, where his father was an overseer on cattle runs and later a teacher. After leaving school he worked as an apprentice blacksmith before moving to Melbourne and joining the Victorian Railways as a clerk. By 1893 he was married with four children and living in Murrumbeena. In 1892 he left the Railways and joined Henry Berry and Company, wholesale grocers, again as a clerk. He enrolled at the Working Men’s College (now RMIT) to study bookkeeping, and then became involved with the Working Men’s College Photographic Club (WMCPC) in order to study photography. He quickly became a proficient photographer, exhibiting and winning numerous prizes.

In 1899 he became Henry Berry’s travelling sales representative in Eastern Victoria. As a keen competitive cyclist he chose the bicycle as his main means of transport, specially constructed to convey him, his sales material and his photographic equipment. He joined a small group associated with the WMCPC calling themselves the ‘Australian School of Photographers’, a group which adopted the pictorial style of photography. During his travels he took hundreds of photographs.

In 1909 he took up professional photography with Vallan Studio, Mansfield. Campbell roaming the countryside taking landscape and streetscape views for postcard production. In 1911 he was employed by the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs as a photographer and

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1 Much of his work involved what would now be regarded as documentary photography, particularly in the later years of his career. In his early years he was immersed in photography as art or pictorialism.
cinematographer producing images to promote Australia overseas as a place to settle. His first assignment involved photographing and filming the landscape and life of the Northern Territory. From this trip he produced the album ‘Souvenir of the visit of the Federal Parliamentary Party to the Northern Territory, April – May 1912’. The booklet *Views of the Northern Territory of Australia*, containing Campbell’s images, was published in 1913 by the Department of External Affairs for official promotional purposes. Campbell travelled all over the country over the next two years. In 1913 he was sacked, much to his dismay, mainly for administrative and photographic-style reasons.

Shortly after the commencement of the First World War Campbell joined the Light Horse (putting his age down), and was soon on a ship bound for Egypt. He carried a camera and documented the trip and aspects of the life of his regiment, the 8th Light Horse, on active duty abroad. They landed on Gallipoli in May 1915, infamously to become involved in the charge at the Nek in August where hundreds were killed. Campbell, a signaller, took many photographs on Gallipoli, documenting everyday life and the treacherous landscape under the extraordinary conditions of trench warfare. His Gallipoli photographs survive in public and private collections. JP Campbell was wounded just prior to the Nek battle. He was later shipped back to Alexandria and hospital with the rest of the wounded. On recovery he worked in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Pay Corps based in Cairo. All the time he took photographs; the soldier/tourist abroad in an exotic land. On postcards he described his photographic adventures to his friend and fellow photographer Lilian Louisa Pitts (1872-1947), at home in Merrigum, Victoria. The Australian War Records Section, founded by CEW Bean, utilised his skills as a photographer on a part time basis.

In March 1918, Campbell became official war photographer for the AIF, replacing Frank Hurley (1885-1962). Campbell was present amongst the Light Horse in the Jordan Valley during the main offensives of mid to late 1918. Unlike Hurley, Campbell’s official war photographs are not generally known today. Many of these images are held by the Australian War Memorial (AWM). Some appear in CEW Bean’s multi-volumed *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, in volumes seven and twelve. In mid 1918 Campbell contracted malaria: his age and the traumas of Gallipoli had caught up with him. He still played the tourist, writing on the
religious and architectural history of Jerusalem for the diggers’ paper, *Kia Ora Coo-ee*. However, his superiors were not happy with his official photographic work during the final push to Damascus by the Allies towards the end of 1918. He was sacked. Devastated, he protested in vain, writing a scathing letter attacking his superior, official war correspondent Henry Gullett who later wrote the official history of Australia’s involvement in Sinai and Palestine during the First World War.

Campbell returned to Australia in early 1919 and in 1920 joined the newly formed State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) as a clerk in Yallourn. He went on to document the formative years of this Latrobe Valley town and the power generating industry under the leadership of Sir John Monash, compiling a comprehensive collection of photographs of great value to historians and former residents of Yallourn today, as the town no longer exists. After performing a number of managerial roles with the SECV over more than a decade, including editing the local newspaper, Campbell was forced to retire, mainly because of ill health. He died of cancer in Murrumbeena in 1935.

Compiled by Dr Alan Harding who completed a PhD thesis on JP Campbell in 2010, a biography produced externally through the Gippsland campus of Monash University, titled ‘JP Campbell: Pictorialist Photographer at Home and at War’.