

# Circa

## The Journal of Professional Historians

Issue one, 2010



Professional Historians Association (Vic) Inc.

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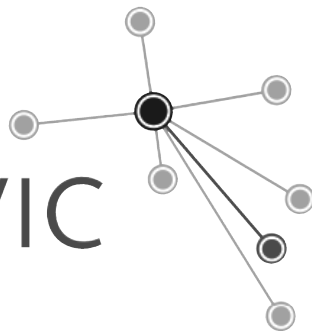
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Issue one, 2010  
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The content of this journal represents the views of the contributors and not the official view of PHA (Vic).

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*Great Petition* by Susan Hewitt and Penelope Lee, in Burston Reserve, Melbourne.

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# EDITORIAL

*Circa: The Journal of Professional Historians* already has a long history. Producing a journal is an idea that has been tossed about in PHA (Vic) circles for quite a few years. The enthusiastic response we received to our call for contributions in late 2008 and the subsequent interest and encouragement confirms that the concept has the support of our members.

The idea behind *Circa* is to provide a forum to publish work that reflects the diverse ways in which professional historians engage with history and practice in areas such as cultural heritage, museums, oral history, commissioned history, the media, education and government. We hope to establish a dialogue between professional historians and to encourage an exchange of ideas and a discussion of the theory and practice of professional history.

The journal is divided into three sections that reflect recurring themes in professional history:

**Explorations** – issues we face as professional historians

**Discoveries** – discovering and telling a story

**Reflections** – thinking about history, its impact on us and our role in understanding it

The ten articles in this edition embrace a range of thought provoking and informative topics. Readers are invited to *explore* issues relating to oral history, biography, online archives, commissioned history and cultural heritage; *discover* three uniquely Australian stories – about Australia's Nazi connections, one woman's contribution to the Monster Petition, and the influence of an 'enigmatic' Vice-Chancellor; and *reflect* on the meaning and significance of pilgrimage and of Aboriginal reconciliation.

This journal is the culmination of more than a year's work for PHA (Vic). Many people have contributed expertise, assistance and advice and I would like to acknowledge and thank them all.

Firstly the contributors – Rachel Buchanan, Jane Carolan, Neville Green, Caitlin Mahar, Amanda McLeod, Heather McRae, Robert Pascoe, Liz Rushen, Emily Turner-Graham and Fay Woodhouse. It is wonderful to have a range of such thoughtful and well written articles within these pages. The authors are to be congratulated for their initiative in submitting their work for consideration and subsequently working to prepare their pieces for publication. We are particularly pleased to have among our contributors PHA WA member Neville Green whose involvement has ensured that this initiative reaches beyond state boundaries.

Ten referees, who remain anonymous, accepted the invitation to provide feedback on the articles and gave of their time generously. They helped ensure that the quality of the work reflected the high standard that was always envisaged for this publication.

Rhonda Barson had the unenviable task of proof reading and editing text written by ten different authors, which she did with thoroughness and care. Jenn Falconer has done a superb job on the design and layout of the journal. In both cases, their professionalism and skill has contributed to a polished publication and I thoroughly enjoyed working with both women.

Images have been sourced from a range of locations. Thank you to Arts Victoria, Heritage Victoria, Mirvac, Office of Australian War Graves, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne for generously providing images. Several contributors also supplied images from their own collections and/or worked diligently to obtain suitable illustrations.

The Australian Council of Professional Historians Associations (ACPHA) made an important contribution to this project by providing funding towards the publication of the journal. This has helped ensure that important elements such as design and printing of the journal are of a suitably high standard.

Finally, thanks are due to the members of the Editorial Board – Tsari Anderson, Susan Aykut, Leigh Edmonds, Emma Russell, Sonia Jennings and Vicky Ryan. The board has been responsible for shaping the journal – determining its focus and scope, preparing guidelines, reading and assessing submissions, appointing referees, providing feedback on drafts, refereeing articles, and deciding on the appearance and style of the final product. The standard of the publication in front of you is due to the persistent work of this group. Acknowledgement is also due to Laura Donati as an early member of the Editorial Board, and to Fay Woodhouse, who originally conceived the idea of the journal and started us on the journey. For both the Editorial Board and the PHA (Vic) Committee of Management, the process of producing a journal for professional historians has been long but ultimately fulfilling.

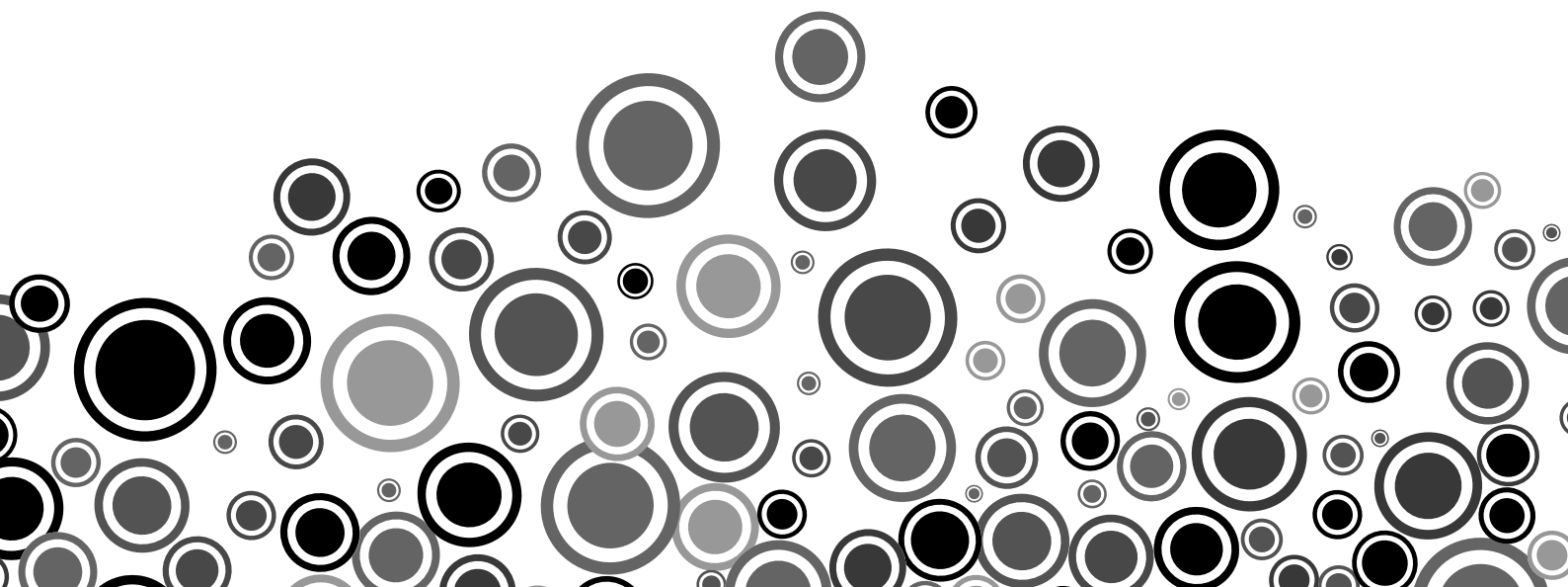
I hope the following pages prompt exploration, discovery and reflection about the work that we do, and encourage celebration of the diversity and richness of professional history in this country.

Katherine Sheedy  
Editor  
February 2010

Part one

# Explorations

Issues we face as professional historians





# ORAL HISTORY MEETS THE MEDIA

## An historian's excursion into radio land

Caitlin Mahar

As part of a Masters of Public History, the author – whose previous experience of oral history had been confined to a tutorial – organised a placement with Radio National's Social History Unit. Haunted by the plethora of ethical and legal issues that seemed to be associated with oral history, and confronted with the prospect of interviewing people about the past and then broadcasting these interviews on radio, the author decided to do a little investigating.

This article explores the ethical and legal issues that surround oral history and what happens to these when an historian is confronted with the practices and ethics of journalism and the media. Through an examination of the history of oral history and reflection on the placement, the paper suggests that the aims and ethical responsibilities of the oral historian and the journalist are not as distinct as historians sometimes like to imagine.

When I was enrolled in a Master of Public History at Monash University some years ago, I organised a placement with Radio National's Social History Unit, then based in Sydney. While waiting to take up my placement, I began to reflect rather uncomfortably on the theory and practice of oral history. My previous experience of oral history had been largely confined to a tutorial and had left me haunted by the intimidating labyrinth of methodological, ethical and legal issues with which it seemed to be associated, particularly those concerned with issues of 'moral ownership' and co-authorship. So, confronted with the prospect of using oral history interviews on radio, I decided to do a little investigating. I rang the Copyright Council and the Australian Broadcasting Association (ABA) in an attempt to discern exactly what contractual and legal issues were involved when recording and broadcasting oral histories.

Spokespeople at both organisations were very helpful but seemed unable to address my particular concerns. The gentleman at the ABA took my queries very seriously and went on to patiently explain that I must, of course,

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It dawned on me that, in radio land, an oral history is just an interview; it may be about the past, but then so are many interviews.

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not defame anyone and that the most important thing was that subjects must know about, and agree to, the interview. To be more precise, he instructed that I must not 'bug' or intercept any conversations, record a private conversation without the consent of all parties involved, or broadcast an identifiable person's words without

informing them. As he explained this I began to realise that he didn't get it: he didn't understand that I was talking about recording and broadcasting *oral histories*, he thought I was just talking about conducting *interviews*. And then I began to realise that I wasn't getting it – from his point of view I was just talking about doing interviews. It dawned on me that, in radio land, an oral history is just an interview; it may be about the past, but then so are many interviews.

What was becoming clear was that in terms of legal issues such as copyright or 'ownership', there is no distinction between an interview conducted by a media practitioner and one conducted by an oral historian that is intended for publication or broadcast. From a legal standpoint an interviewee has no copyright in what he or she has said. The interviewer who supplied the tape, or the employer of the interviewer, is usually considered to 'own' the interview and any edited/re-written versions that are subsequently published are considered the interviewer's creation. In the case of radio, the edited end product is considered the producer's creation.<sup>1</sup>

But this clarification left me rather bamboozled: what was I and what was I doing?

### Where did I come from?

At the time, the idea that the law did not distinguish between an oral history and a journalistic interview came as something of a revelation; at first glance the professional profile and concerns of the oral historian and the journalist appear so distinct. Yet perhaps it should not have come as such a surprise because, historically, the two seem inextricably linked, although it's rare to find an academic historian examining these links. Contemporary oral history practitioners gesture to a number of antecedents: the 'history' of pre-literate



societies characterised by the oral traditions handed from one generation to the next; Greek writers such as Herodotus and Thucydides, who spoke to witnesses when compiling their accounts of past events; and, more recently, the work of folklorists and anthropologists who began to use interviews to garner information in the early twentieth century. However there is general agreement that the modern concept, and naming, of oral history and its establishment as an academic activity can be traced to the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> And if we look at these beginnings, it seems to me that the modern oral history movement's closest antecedent is the journalistic interview.

The interview first emerged as a journalistic technique in America about one hundred and forty years ago. It was a method that quickly came to be prized for its ability to capture the ideas and activities of influential and celebrated individuals in an objective, cheap and entertaining way. Many contemporaries celebrated the democratic qualities of this new method and the way it gave ordinary people an insight into the doings and views of influential people. Others complained it was bringing the profession into disrepute, causing editors to dispense with traditional serious commentary and opinion in favour of trivial, sometimes fawning, reports. In the 1860s the *Chicago Tribune* argued that those New York papers publishing interviews were peddling 'a kind of toadyism or flunkeyism, which they call interviewing'.<sup>3</sup> But the interview stuck, and by the end of the nineteenth century it had become a routine part of journalism.

Some of the earliest observers of this new journalistic technique remarked on its potential in another field – as a tool for collecting and preserving historical evidence. In an 1890 article, 'The art of interviewing', American journalist Frank Burr reflected that the material created by interviews was a boon for future as well as present readers: '... had it not been for the interview much valuable matter relating to the history of the country since 1860 would have been lost, not only to the nation, but to the nation's annals'.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, it's perhaps not surprising that in the mid-twentieth century many of those who first saw the potential of the interview as a valuable historical tool had backgrounds in journalism. Most of the well-known and popular oral history collections and biographies of the twentieth century were not produced by trained historians. Alex Haley, who produced the best-selling *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (1965) and the blockbuster *Roots: the saga of an American family* (1977), was a journalist. Studs Terkel, perhaps the western world's most celebrated oral history practitioner, was a broadcaster and talk show personality. Wendy

Lowenstein, who popularised oral history in Australia with books like *Weevils in the Flour* (1978), began her working life as a journalist with the *Radio Times*.

Within academia it was two ex-newspapermen turned historians, Allan Nevins and Louis Starr, who championed the use of oral history through the pioneering Oral History Research Office established at Columbia University in 1948.<sup>5</sup> Nevins, known as 'the father of oral history', seemed to echo and extend journalist Frank Burr's thinking when he described the impetus for this new movement in his 1938 book *The Gateway to History*. He argued that interviews could be used to record the thoughts of prominent and

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Oral history has come to be haunted by a number of ethical concerns and practices that are completely foreign to journalism.

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influential individuals for posterity and called for an organisation to systematically 'attempt to obtain, from the lips and papers of significant Americans who have led significant lives, a fuller record of their participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of the last sixty years'.<sup>6</sup> In this spirit, numerous historians and archivists across America established oral history projects and set out to interview social and political elites.<sup>7</sup>

But these are not the beginnings that animate the academic theory and practice of oral history today. The links between the journalistic and oral history interview – those I have emphasised above – tend to be overshadowed by a focus on the oral history boom of the late 1960s and 1970s: a boom fuelled by more self-consciously politically progressive historians. By looking at the ideas that underpinned oral history at this time, I think we can begin to see how oral history has come to be haunted by a number of ethical concerns and practices that are completely foreign to journalism.

In the 1960s and 1970s, socialist and feminist historians – people like Paul Thompson in England and Sherna Berger Gluck in America – were not interested in interviewing the social and political elites who were the subjects of those earlier academic oral histories. Committed to documenting a 'history from below', their interviewees were members of the working class: women, people of colour and immigrants. In his internationally influential 1978 book *The Voice of the Past*, Thompson argued that, because it enabled witnesses to be 'called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated', oral history had 'radical implications' for history as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

In the hands of this generation of historians, the interview was consciously used as a political as well as an historical tool. Oral history was, and continues to be, celebrated as a technique that democratised the study of the past, by capturing the views of those who have traditionally been ignored or misrepresented by history. Further, many practitioners saw oral history as a way

of empowering individuals and groups and thus giving impetus to particular political ideas and movements. As Gluck writes, for many early feminist oral historians the interview was thought of as a bonding political experience that helped promote the cause of women's liberation: 'Not only did the oral histories that were being collected help introduce women into history, but also this very process implied advocacy.'<sup>9</sup>

Theoretical developments and debates in more recent years have not fundamentally altered this situation. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson note that many contemporary oral historians are intent on linking, '... theoretical sophistication about subjectivity, narrative and memory with the political commitment to history of oppressed and marginal groups which motivated the first generation feminist and socialist oral historians'.<sup>10</sup> Gluck states this intention clearly when she writes that oral history remains an important tool for 'empowering women' and 'advocating on their behalf by documenting their experiences of discrimination and subordination'.<sup>11</sup>

Many oral historians have sought to turn this political commitment into methodological and ethical principles. This is reflected in the considerable academic literature devoted to exploring how to make the interview encounter a collaborative venture between the interviewer and interviewee that involves mutually agreeable outcomes.<sup>12</sup> It is also reflected in the detailed codes of ethics and interview guidelines that have been developed by many oral history groups and associations.<sup>13</sup> These typically advocate that the interviewer: treat the interview as confidential until a written agreement has been created; conduct careful discussions about authorship/ownership with the interviewee; ensure that interviewees are given the opportunity to review, correct and/or withdraw material in transcripts and/or final products resulting from the oral history; and that subjects sign a release form before any of the material is used by the interviewer/historian. For the American Oral History Association this collaborative ethic extends to the idea that interviewers 'should conscientiously consider how they might share with interviewees and their communities the rewards and recognition that might result from their work'.<sup>14</sup>

Early oral history guides dealt primarily with legal questions of the sort that would be familiar to journalists.<sup>15</sup> But, as my discussion with the man at the ABA suggested, oral history guidelines today, and the moral and ethical issues they seek to address or manage, don't seem immediately relevant to media practitioners. And you can understand why. Such practices, founded as they are on notions of collaboration and co-authorship, have sprung from a very particular political/historical commitment and have been designed with a certain type of interviewee in

mind. From the tradition of social history, or a history from the bottom up, has sprung the assumption that the subjects of oral history are groups and individuals with whom the historian-interviewer will empathise and whose politics and world-views she will share and may even be seeking to advocate.

The problems inherent in enshrining these ideas in universal ethical codes and interview guidelines are thrown in to sharp relief if you imagine an interviewee who is not a common oral history subject. Say, instead of a working class woman, former slave, immigrant, refugee or union leader, you are interviewing a Hollywood producer, prominent Liberal politician, wealthy entrepreneur, CEO of a financial institution, or members of a racist hate group. Suddenly ethics and practices that are based on notions of advocacy or collaboration and co-authorship, or sharing 'rewards and recognition', look more like unscholarly collusion or deceptive promotion of a cause. Studies like oral historian Katherine Blee's of ordinary men and women who belonged to the 1920s' Klu Klux Klan highlight the fact that if oral history is to offer judicious understanding of the past, practitioners need to instead take a 'critical approach to oral evidence and to the process of interviewing' (whoever the subject).<sup>16</sup> Suddenly an ethical oral history sounds like it might not look so different from any form of scholarship or, perhaps – given they both deal with living sources – the ethics of journalism.

Indeed, literary scholar and oral history practitioner Alessandro Portelli recalls that, until he was asked to speak about oral history and ethics at a conference in 1995, it had never occurred to him that there 'might be any specific ethics involved in oral history other than those involved in being a citizen and a professional intellectual'. He writes:

... ethical and legal guidelines only make sense if they are the outward manifestation of a broader political commitment to honesty and truth. In the context of oral history, by commitment to honesty I mean personal respect for the people we work with and intellectual respect for the material we receive.<sup>17</sup>

Portelli makes the point that a commitment to intellectual honesty and 'doing the right thing' by a subject cannot be learnt from a professional handbook. Indeed, he notes, diligently following ethical codes and guidelines is not incompatible with foul play. If we oral historians are ever intent on the misrepresentation or falsification of sources we might, in fact, cynically use the ethical guidelines to protect ourselves from the claims of the interviewee, thinking, 'we have gone through the prescribed steps, anything goes; they can't sue us'.<sup>18</sup>

Reading Portelli, the ethical issues involved in recording and using oral history suddenly come into focus. And, perhaps initially uncomfortably for the historian, these issues do not seem so different from those that underpin the journalistic interview. Journalist Vivian Gornick outlines a similar commitment to personal and intellectual honesty when she suggests that her obligations to interviewees are simply to tell them the truth about her research and represent their meaning truthfully.<sup>19</sup>

### Where am I?

I was left both disoriented and relieved to discover that many of the issues that worry oral historians and shape the theory and practice of oral history in academia were nowhere in evidence when it came to conducting and using interviews about the past in radio. At Radio National I found no worrying about joint copyright or 'ownership' of material, no written contracts or release forms, no practice of sending interviewees transcripts of an interview, no habit of allowing subjects to edit or review their interview or the final product of an interview. The aims and methods of radio render such ideas and methods impractical and potentially suspect. This is partly due to radio's strong connection to disciplines of journalism and communication studies, and partly to do with the nature of the medium itself.

Radio producers tend to have trained and worked as journalists and this entails quite specific attitudes to interviewing and the final product. David Dunaway, an historian who has worked as a radio producer, describes it this way:

The radio producer is taught to conduct an interview on a moment's notice, under adverse circumstances, and to ferret out a story, overcoming the reluctance of the subject with a combination of bravado, cunning and persistence. He or she reaches the controversial points fast, evokes a show of emotion, and presents the material all in a short time frame.<sup>20</sup>

The journalist is heir to a tradition that sees a central role of journalism as calling the wealthy and powerful to account. Far from assuming a collaborative relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the journalist is more likely to assume an investigative – even confrontational (think of the average political interview) – role in her pursuit of honesty and truth. For the radio interviewer or producer, time constraints and the nature of the medium make the production of transcripts and any review or editing of material by the interviewee impractical. Besides this, within the field of journalism, such routine collaboration would clearly leave reporters/producers open to charges of collusion

with their subjects and undermine media ideals of objectivity.

Although historian David Dunaway appears to describe the aims and methods of the radio reporter/producer accurately enough, his description also seems imbued with a certain cynicism. Here it's implied that the journalistic interview is a more cynical, exploitative exercise than oral history. However, in the context of the ABC's Social History Unit I did not feel this was the case; I didn't feel I was surrounded by another species of interviewer. Perhaps this is because within the Unit what might be thought of as 'typical' journalistic aims and method are tempered by the historical and pre-produced, documentary-like, nature of the work. But maybe it's also simply because Dunaway's comments say at least as much about *the historian's view of journalism* as they do about the profession itself. When I first read Dunaway's description I felt a certain smug recognition – ah, yes, journalistic interviews can be cynical and exploitative. Later I recognised my reaction as self-serving and wondered: how are the interviews I conducted and like to think of as 'oral histories' different from a journalistic interview?

### What am I doing?

During my placement I was working on *Verbatim*. This is a pre-produced, single interview program that aired at 5 pm on Saturdays and was repeated at 11 am on Wednesdays. Programs are presented as oral histories/life stories, which are shaped around a particular event or theme. My first job was to conduct an interview for *Verbatim*. Relieved of the forms and codes that accompany the 'ideal' oral history, I initially felt a little uncomfortable. I set out, armed with a commitment to personal and intellectual honesty and a shaky knowledge of my recording device, feeling rather naked.

While still in Melbourne, I had been sent a list of the themes and suggested topics (with possible subjects attached to some) for that year's *Verbatim* and it was suggested that I attempt to track down someone in Melbourne to interview. I initially set about doing too much of the wrong type of research. Within a week or so I had become a minor expert on the Ronald Ryan hanging, the 1956 Olympics and the Communist referendum (three of the suggested topics), but had not canvassed any potential interview subjects. I felt I couldn't call a potential interviewee until I knew a reasonable amount about 'their' area, but, I suspect, I also immersed myself in the research in order to avoid doing some of the things I found more difficult about tracking down subjects.

In radio, time constraints and the need to canvass the 'talent' of a potential interviewee make it impractical to take the 'send out a polite introductory letter and see whether they're keen' approach. But

initially I found it difficult to get used to the tactics that were obviously required (because they seemed too intrusive, too journalistic and I have a slight phone phobia), namely: phone book searches/guess calls, cold calling, and non-committal chats on the phone designed to assess 'talent'. However, as it turned out, in my admittedly limited experience, the people I spoke to seemed perfectly willing to be interviewed for this program, and even the couple of people who I rang accidentally (i.e. who had the same initial and surname as a potential subject) did not seem terribly put out.

I found an interview subject, but my first interview, recorded on a mini-disc, was a dud as far as radio was concerned. Although the sound quality was fine, and my interviewee proved very willing to talk, it couldn't be used. I had recorded enough material to shape a decent *written* piece, or even a 'grab' for radio, but the interview was too loose, full of assumed information and unfinished anecdotes, to make an effective single-interview program. I was too nervous and inexperienced to intervene, rein in and direct my rather imposing subject's rambling style in a way that might have enabled it to be used for *Verbatim*.

A second interview in Sydney was more successful – or, I should say, ultimately more successful. This was conducted with Pearlie McNeill. Pearlie is a woman who spent time in various psychiatric hospitals in Sydney during the late 1960s and early 1970s. She has semi-fictionalised her experiences in her book, *Counting the Rivers*.<sup>21</sup> I felt uneasy about the interview. Edward Price Bell suggested a long time ago that all interviews involve 'the art of extracting personal statements for publication', but some things seem more personal than others.<sup>22</sup>

I should also have been nervous about using the DAT (Digital Audio Tape) machine. As it turned out, after conducting what I confidently thought was a good radio interview, I discovered on the train back to town that I had somehow managed to record none of it. I gulped down my pride and returned the following day to do it all over again with an accommodating and understanding Pearlie.

My interview with Pearlie was produced as a program for *Verbatim* after my placement had ended. A producer would have re-arranged and edited the interview, added an introduction and contextual links, and chosen music and sound effects. The program would have been shaped with that week's theme in mind and, more subtly, by the individual producer's particular traits, beliefs and quirks, becoming, in a very tangible sense, their creation. I know this because earlier in my placement I had produced a program for *Verbatim* based on an interview conducted with

Margaret Gleeson by Siobhan McHugh for McHugh's book *Shelter from the Storm*.<sup>23</sup> It's only in retrospect that I wonder how Pearlie and Margaret felt about the version of themselves re-produced on *Verbatim*, or how the interviewee who never appeared on the show felt about ending up on the cutting room floor.

To all intents and purposes, I had a successful placement, but I recount it here emphasising the embarrassing stumbles and a lingering sense of unease. I've done this in an attempt to highlight what anyone who has conducted an interview, whatever their professional background, already knows: interviewing people can be an unnerving business.

It's perhaps particularly unnerving for oral historians. The idea that a central purpose of oral history is to give voice to the under-represented and oppressed has made many practitioners increasingly aware of the power

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'invariably and inescapably  
lopsided' and a 'moral  
impasse' lies at its heart.**

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imbalances and tensions that are built into the interview enterprise. Some oral historians in academia have explicitly struggled with the idea that, despite all their efforts to make oral history a collaborative endeavour, the interviewer-subject relationship is imbued with moral ambiguity and may be an inherently exploitative one; the logic of the interview situation dictates that the interviewer extracts a (hi)story for their professional purposes, uses (or dumps) it, and moves on.<sup>24</sup> Explicitly or implicitly, the idea that historians need to conscientiously try to manage the exploitative potential of the interview imbues all levels of the profession. Most of us, even the student setting out on a placement, seem to worry about this. We worry not just that we are doing oral history effectively, but that we are doing it ethically. Questions of copyright, ownership, review and even interviewing style are considered so important because they are understood to be moral as well as technical/legal issues. This is why, as David Dunaway puts it, they are 'matters over which full-time oral historians lose sleep'.<sup>25</sup>

While oral historians toss and turn, it is a journalist, Janet Malcolm, who offers the most clear-eyed and merciless examination of the ethics of the interview. She argues that the interview relationship is 'invariably and inescapably lopsided' and that a 'moral impasse' lies at its heart. The interviewer inevitably presents himself as a sort of 'false friend' to the subject and thus always in some sense betrays him. She emphasises that the sense of inequality and moral ambiguity that haunt the interview encounter do not simply arise if the interviewer acts unethically or in conscious bad faith; they are *always* and *inevitably* built into the situation.<sup>26</sup>

Like journalists, oral historians have discovered that sometimes all the personal and intellectual integrity in the world cannot resolve the ethical conundrums to

which the interview situation gives rise. Consider, for example: the oral historian who decided it was in the interests of the reader and historical truth to include material in a biography, even though it caused another of her interviewees distress; the scholar who went to great lengths to disguise the identity of her interviewees in a published study but was left with 'nagging feelings that some had been offended'; interviewees who have said they felt hurt when the interviewer, who they have confided in and perceive as a friend, ceases contact.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, buoyed by the proliferation of oral history guidelines and methodological prescriptions in the academic literature, we may sometimes suffer from the delusion that we navigate the interview encounter in a more ethical way than do journalists. This is reflected in the censure implicit when an oral historian observes that some of those (often journalists) who appear to be doing oral history haven't followed the 'proper' guidelines.<sup>28</sup> But, as I have suggested, oral history ethics were born of a particular time and out of

particular priorities and do not always look so ethical or make sense in other contexts.

Extensive discussion of oral history ethics doesn't make us more ethical interviewers than journalists – just, perhaps, more anxious ones. Historically, our profession is new to the interview. And, like a new interviewer, we tend to approach the enterprise with a mixture of anxiety and idealism; oral historians anxiously cling to the idea that if we can just refine our methodology and guidelines we can somehow clarify the moral ambiguity and neutralise the inequality that haunt the interview enterprise. We continue to hope we can overcome that moral impasse.

## Acknowledgments

My thanks to Seamus O'Hanlon for reading a very early draft, Helen MacDonald for more recent comments and members of Radio National's Social History Unit for being so accommodating.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Sally Walker, *The Law of Journalism*, The Law Book Company, Sydney, 1989, pp. 330–333 and Des Butler and Sharon Roderick, *Australian Media Law*, LBC Information Services, Sydney, 1999, pp. 372–384. Some legal uncertainty does surround the status of a *verbatim* interview transcript supplied to the public (and thus the deposit of transcripts in libraries).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Rebecca Sharpless, 'The history of oral history', in T.L. Charlton, L. E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (eds), *Thinking About Oral History: theories and applications*, AltaMira Press, Lanham, 2008, pp. 7–30.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, Viking, London, 1993, p. 5; see also Alan J. Lee, *Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855–1914*, Croom Helm, London, 1976, pp. 118–130.

<sup>4</sup> Silvester, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Nevins, 'Oral history: how and why it was born', in D.K. Dunaway and W.K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: an interdisciplinary anthology*, Sage Publications, California, 1996, pp. 29–38; Louis Starr, 'Oral History', *ibid.*, pp. 39–57.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Nevins, 'Preface', *The Gateway to History*, Anchor Book, Garden City, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> See Sharpless, in Charlton et al, loc. cit., for summary of these.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press, London, 1978, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Women's oral history: is it so special?', in Charlton et al, op. cit. p. 118.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Gluck, in Charlton et al, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the influential Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: a practical guide for social scientists*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Perks and Thomson, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> Oral History Association, 'Oral history evaluation guidelines', available online at <[http://www.oralhistory.org/network/mw/index.php/Evaluation\\_Guide](http://www.oralhistory.org/network/mw/index.php/Evaluation_Guide)>, accessed 15 March 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Gluck, in Charlton et al, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Blee, 'Evidence, empathy and ethics: lessons from oral histories of the Klan', in Perks and Thomson, op. cit., p. 323.

<sup>17</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: oral history and the art of dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1997, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, op. cit., p. 106. Yow makes rather disapproving reference to Gornick's stance.

<sup>20</sup> David Dunaway, 'Radio and the public use of oral history', in Dunaway and Baum, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>21</sup> Pearlle McNeill, *Counting the Rivers*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Silvester, op. cit., p. i.

<sup>23</sup> Siobhan McHugh, *Shelter from the Storm: Bryan Brown, Samoan chieftains and the little matter of a roof over our heads*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds), *Women's Words: the feminist practice of oral history*, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 1–5.

<sup>25</sup> Dunaway, 'Radio and the public use of oral history', op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*, Vintage Books, New York, 1990, pp.162–163.

<sup>27</sup> For these and other examples, see Valerie Yow 'Biography and oral history', in Charlton et al, op. cit., pp. 215–16; Yow, *Recording Oral History*, op. cit., pp. 99–100; Valerie Yow, 'Ethics and interpersonal relationships', *The Oral History Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, implied criticism of Studs Terkel by Sharpless, in Charlton et al, op. cit., p. 19.

# TELLING PORTRAITS

## The nexus between biography and history

Jane Mayo Carolan

History is about the pursuit of truth, even when it is stranger than fiction. A biographer, especially in a commissioned work, has the added responsibility of placing the subject in context. Reputations are at stake. Biographies need to capture the relationship between the individual and society, the local and national, the past and present with the public and private experience.

The research involves grappling with theories of memory, relationship and representation as well as debates about literacy. The process is rather like juggling. A biographer must learn to manage several aspects simultaneously to be able to enter the private life of the subject and not rest content with the public image. There is a need to negotiate the line between what is socially acceptable in recounting real lives and what is unacceptable. Drawing from two recent biographies this paper explores how a writer, over four years, lived beside two domineering industrialists to unearth the human dimension in history.

### Introduction

Writing a biography is not without difficulties. The balance between narrative and analysis is problematic despite the range of sources available. Character and interpretation, censorship and intervention are very tangible challenges. The contradictions of a life emerge from tattered suitcases, boxes and boxes of official and unofficial correspondence, personal diaries and newspaper accounts. Sifting, sorting and imaging the life of the subject require taking risks and having stamina. Creating the work itself is a social act. It entails entering the worlds of people who are different in both time and place but who, like ourselves, were once alive and by whose experiences we are enriched.

It is essential to appraise the subject matter before accepting the commission. Tackling the mystery of a life is no mean enterprise. Is the subject the right person for you to spend hours of your life with? A biographer may need to be able to overcome personal dislikes of aspects of the subject's personality. Minute details of daily life are often more revealing than the grand performances. But above all the work must be penetrating and interpretative, providing engaging insights to captivate the reader.

### Commissioning biographies

No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men.

THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881)

*Heroes and Hero Worship*

Telling portraits' is based on two separate commissioned biographies that I have recently undertaken. Both publications were instigated and sponsored by the families of the subject. These families acted as

old-fashioned patrons; they sponsored the projects financially, provided the initial research material and guided the works to fruition.

History is about the pursuit of truth, even when it is stranger than fiction. A biographer, especially in a commissioned work, has the added responsibility of placing the subject in context. Reputations are at stake. Biographies need to capture the relationship between the individual and society, the past and the present, with the public and private experience. The research involves grappling with theories of memory, relationship and representation as well as debates about literacy. From my experience the process is rather like juggling. A biographer must learn to manage several aspects simultaneously to be able to enter the private life of the subject and not rest content with the public image. The main challenge is a need to negotiate the line between what is socially acceptable in recounting real lives and what is unacceptable. For four years I lived beside two domineering industrialists to unearth the human dimension in history.

There are many different ways to approach questions about the individual life in history and how to measure the effect of one person on others. I see myself as a storyteller – a teller of tales. In reality a commissioned work is the sponsor's story, not yours – you are merely the conduit. Historical novels are wonderful companions to, but never substitutes for, biographical history. Historical works may be imaginative but not fictional. They need plausible and verifiable pasts based on a close interpretation of the surviving evidence that also includes evaluating the gaps in the records. The difference to general history is that a biography looks at the whole life, not just the interesting parts, while still sustaining the momentum.

An important aspect is to be clear and remain clear about your avowed aims in tackling a biography. The intended result of your project should be contemplated. This in itself will help to identify and resolve potential conflicts or difficulties before they arise. This is easier said than done. It brings to mind how the historical novelist, Henry James, often said that art is neat and life is untidy. You will be challenged about your subject, not only in the commissioning but all the way through the research, writing, publication and reception of your book. Intellectually, financially, practically and psychologically, the task of serious biography is an undertaking that you must appraise carefully before committing yourself. More than just responding to a commission you need to form your own appreciation of the subject, including the less admirable aspects of the project.

When approached, it is critical to understand the sponsor's intent from the outset. Why do they see their subject as important or worthy? Writing a biography is a three-way process between the sponsor, the author and the subject. The sponsors for the two biographies I undertook were family members passionate to have their fathers' roles recorded for history. This in itself is a double-edged sword.

Sir Henry Somerset (1906–1995) and Sir David Zeidler (1918–1998) were captains of industry. They were tall poppies, and current historians have considered industrial leaders to be rather unfashionable topics. They form part of a relatively small group of people who, in the middle fifty years of the twentieth century, established a solid foundation in industry and bequeathed to their successors the legacy on which much of the country's subsequent prosperity was founded. Regrettably, little has been published about any of these unassuming achievers. It was not in their nature to write about themselves and what they did write is invariably understated.

Both sponsors felt that there was a story to be told in the context of Australia's industrial and scientific advances. The stories they wanted to recount were similar. The subjects of the biographies were ambitious, well educated and successful. They were both the product of an age where exactness, good manners and ethics were scrupulously observed. But the parallels ceased there. I discovered that they were two very different people and their individuality determined the uniqueness of my narrative. One was gregarious, enjoyed the limelight and

was a consummate speaker; the other was reserved and measured in his approach and seldom committed himself to public examination. Yet both developed management styles befitting their roles and became influential leaders in their respective fields.

It is vital for a biographer to engage with the work and personality of the person. I was drawn to these men because of my own upbringing. My fascination with the development of Australian industries began during my childhood in suburban Melbourne when I accompanied my father on his routine Saturday morning inspections of the ICIANZ (now Orica) chemical works. The machinery, heat, fumes and smells emanating from the production of industrial explosives and fertilisers were secondary to the warm responses of the workers who explained the processes in a rich array of accents, demonstrating pride in being part of Australia's post-war manufacturing revolution. I was connected – I had the motivation, a little understanding of the topic but no knowledge of the players themselves.

Tackling the mystery of a life is no mean enterprise. A commissioned biography is not about character assassination – far from it. The biggest challenge when working on an authorised work with family members is hagiography, the biography of saints. My sponsors, as family members, were naturally biased. They were stakeholders and had personal emotional connections with the subject. For them the process of writing and research involved the daunting prospect of exposing aspects of their personal lives to public scrutiny. It also called on them to have the ability to reassess and reflect on events that had influenced their

fathers' lives and, at times, to be able to accept alternative interpretations. The author needs to be persuasive.

In each case the sponsors were the daughters of the subject. Two daughters jointly commissioned the Somerset biography and three daughters jointly commissioned the Zeidler biography. They were highly educated, articulate women who seemed to be aware of the pitfalls of commissioned works. But, as is often the case in commissioned histories, it was their first foray into publishing. Position in the family counted. The eldest daughter took on the management and direction of the project. She was the custodian of the family papers and her sisters were guided by her initiatives. Not surpris-



Henry St Somerset with his young son, Harry (later Sir Henry), at Mount Morgan.

ingly the younger daughters had a different take on their fathers' roles and a different light on their parenting. Their views had to be taken into consideration.

I was comfortable with this as I was the youngest in my family. Our family had been divided into two halves because my father had served overseas for five years during the Second World War. Half of my siblings were born in Adelaide before the war and I was the last of the post-war litter born in Melbourne many years later. As I was growing up I loved being in a household of adults but always felt that my older siblings' understanding of our parents was different to mine. In effect we belonged to two separate generations. The older members were privy to different family secrets and experiences to my own.

The biographer's weapon is to set clear objectives at the outset of each commission and be prepared to argue for the tactful inclusion of contentious material, on a case-by-case basis, but only if this material explains how the individual was thinking or acting. While I do not subscribe to the fatal flaw approach, employed by historian Manning Clark, to explain a person's personality or actions, striking a balance between inflating or deflating the subject's achievements is tricky. Equally daunting is interpreting how much of their success was due to others or just to being in the right place at the right time. My biographies were not stories about rags to riches. The sponsors were not seeking an idealisation of their fathers' lives but they were very keen for a strong statement about the importance of their contribution to Australian industrial history.

Is biographical research the same as historical exploration? Yes – and no. The methodology is identical: the biographer works in the same archives and libraries as the historian and trawls similar documents but with a different eye. One person is the centrepiece – that person's roles and personality form the main agenda and dictate the narrative.

Historians have an advantage over biographers, in that from the start they are taught to keep their distance and, for the most part, their comparative objectivity. They may suffer from ideological prejudices but are less emotionally invested in their portrayal of individuals than biographers, whose personal relationship with the subject is crucial to the success of their enterprise. The challenge is to follow, document and verify the results with genuine open-minded curiosity: exploring with honesty and humility the mystery, myths and realities of each life. It is also important to stop seeing passion and objectivity as mutually exclusive.

To undertake this challenge I explored the evidence that helped to understand and describe the context, the environment, the social and political forces and

wider developments that served as the background to their portraits as individuals. Both men were leaders in industry. During their working lives local manufacture and industrial enterprise were linchpins in Australia's post-war economic revolution. The concepts of environmental conservation and global warming were emerging concerns during the lives of Sir Henry and Sir David. Both men loved the bush, were naturalists and sought to protect endangered species. Both worked to reduce pollution, promote safety in the workplace and care for the welfare of their workers. In today's context they could be found wanting, but during their careers they were astute and ahead of their time.

In the end, however, it is the personal foreground that ultimately makes biography electrifying. The trick is to keep your own voice while letting the subject talk. There is often a gap between public persona and private lives and there were times when I struggled to find the intersection of the two. Sir Henry was an inveterate story and joke teller who



Left: Sir Henry Beaufort Somerset.

loved making speeches. I felt that the inclusion of his jokes would somehow belittle the story or distract the reader from the serious content of his delivery. The family helped me to understand that humour was an essential element in his personality and was his way of making a serious point without giving offence. Sir David was a very private, dignified person and it was a challenge to flesh him out. His letters were invariably civilised and conventional with few domestic details. His armour was seldom dented. But the custodians of his papers more than made up for this with insightful asides, unrestricted access to all of his papers and thoughtful introductions to those who knew him.

## Researching biographies

The art of Biography  
Is different from Geography  
Geography is about maps  
But Biography is about chaps  
EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY (1875-1956)  
*Biography for Beginners*

In biography, the quality of research will dictate the quality of writing. My aim is to try and identify what events changed, influenced or shaped a life. I make no apology for starting my research by establishing the milieu of the time of the subject's birth, although this might not be how I write the eventual narrative. But I employ a bit of the Dr Who approach at the outset to set myself in the person's space. Researching true stories is a fascinating struggle between imagination and



evidence. You discover something about yourself as well as the place and society that you are travelling through.

Initially my research focus is on pre-history – when did the family first come to Australia and under what circumstances? My interest is not genealogy, *per se*, but in the exploration of cultural and religious influences. Often this background material does not make it to the published text but can shed light on influences to track during the subject's own life. For example, Sir David was the son of an immigrant German seafarer. Although Sir David did not learn to speak German he grew up in the knowledge that his father had sacrificed a great deal for his family by making a new life in Australia. Throughout his life Sir David was concerned about those displaced from their homelands. He encouraged migrants to



A portrait of Sir David Zeidler by society photographer Athol Shmith.

study, promoted them to positions of responsibility in science and industry, and served as a foundation director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

In a logbook I dedicate the right hand side of a page to each year in the life of the subject and jot down notes of important happenings and major events as they occurred – an old-fashioned time-line which saves an awful lot of back tracking. On the left hand side of the logbook I denote major external events, wars, depression, changes in government and the like – thus placing events of the time opposite events of a life.

Once the basic facts have been established you have to dig deeper. You need more than lists, you need flesh and blood. If you cannot feel that your subject would have bled if pricked, then you have entered his world stripped of human feeling and morality. How do you get to know your subject? Research and reflection assist in understanding your subject. Combining the two processes will constantly affect your agenda, your design, your composition and your audience's needs and expectations. The ideal way to connect with the reader is to connect the individual life with universal aspects of the human condition. Avoid drawing up a list of positives and negatives about your subject. This will enable you to develop the ability to put yourself in their shoes.

Great patience is needed as I engage with my chosen life through its extant remains. There are three main types of sources in researching an historical biography – personal papers, public papers and oral history. Both sponsor families were bowerbirds, preserving ephemera alongside learned papers and key correspondence. It was as though they had a sense of destiny, that they were making history through the preservation of these surviving documents.

It is unlikely, however, that family papers will expose

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Biographers need not only focus  
and a sense of occasion to produce  
something special, but also the stamina  
and the routine to keep working on  
one central topic month after month.

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any episodes of self-doubt and discontentment that your subject might have experienced. You may need to trawl further, and this is not just for entertainment. Our subjects have the right to be heard by posterity in their own terms. On the other hand you cannot flesh out a character if the evidence is not there. The biographer is not in charge of the plot and can only draw conclusions from evidence. Some clues can be found in unsent letters, personal diaries and remembered conversations – not all aspects of a life are heroic.

External papers lodged in libraries and archives are instrumental in fleshing out the sponsors' personal collections. The University of Melbourne Archives and the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University have wonderful collections of business papers. Newspaper accounts give a feel for how the media interpreted both the leadership and the industries that my subjects were involved with. A surprisingly rich additional repository is located in the archives of government boards and inquiries; professional and learned associations; and community, welfare and philanthropic groups that they were active in. These covered interest groups, scientific research institutions, professional bodies and international organisations.



A meeting of like minds at the Australian Academy of Science, Canberra. Left to right: Thomas Conroy, the author's father; Sir Frederick White, Chairman of CSIRO; and Sir David Zeidler.



ICI Board Members – the intersection of the two biographies. Seated fifth from the left is Sir David Zeidler, to his left is Sir Henry Somerset.

The biographer needs to be resourceful and inventive to be able to come to an understanding about subjects in which they have no background or training. For me, it was extremely important to understand the technical complexities and scientific research undertaken by each man that had underpinned his industrial successes. You must not be afraid to seek advice from experts to unravel the significance of a scientific thesis, a patent or an invention. By the end of each project I had a layman's understanding of the technicalities of how paper was made from Australian trees and how plastics were made from petrochemicals – processes that continue to underpin our daily consumption. I used paper produced by the mill that Sir Harry had founded, for the publication of his book.

No one methodology can govern the conduct of an interview. Each interview commands its own rules of engagement. If I reel off lists of questions the interviewee may balk, take offence and feel manipulated. If I let the interview take its own course vital information may not get addressed. Somewhere between the two is a dialogue that permits one to learn what the interviewee has to offer in the way of insights and perspective. Moreover, an interview can often reveal an additional pointer on the complicated trail of documentary evidence. Sometimes a reluctant interviewee needs time to develop confidence in the sincerity, fairness and honesty of the approach. Often I had to listen to a great deal of extraneous material about the interviewee's own life before finding an intersection with my topic. It pays

to be patient, as often this is the person who will later release unpublished letters, diaries and photographs that enliven the narrative. Interviewees often passed me onto other witnesses who inevitably turned up further documents not seen before.

In meetings I try to elicit impressions about personal details and ask for descriptions of the subject's appearance, habits, traits, features and ways of talking. What examples can the interviewee give to illustrate those qualities? What are the adjectives that they most commonly used to describe the subject? Each person interviewed has his own point of view, and insofar as it is possible I attempt to illustrate the subjective, personal nature of their testimony by quoting them verbatim, so that their very syntax reflects the way they thought and spoke. Interlacing this testimony with my assembled documents is a huge task.

### Writing biographies

Read no history: nothing but biography, for that is life without theory.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, EARL OF BEACONSFIELD (1804-1881)  
*Contarini Fleming*

Research is the fun part, writing is another matter. I recall reading a long time ago that writing an historical biography was like trying to pick up bits of mercury from the floor. The facts are incredibly slippery. Every time that you think that you have captured something, it slithers away.



The author, Jane Mayo Carolan, visiting the nature reserve named after Sir Henry.

You must like your own company to become a biographer. For biographers need not only focus and a sense of occasion to produce something special, but also the stamina and the routine to keep working on one central topic month after month. The biographer speaks to the reader with a directness and personal intimacy that is both frightening and exhilarating. That is born of solitude.

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Writing an historical biography was like trying to pick up bits of mercury from the floor. The facts are incredibly slippery.

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You can never speak for the subject, but unless a biographer speaks, the insights, experiences, pain or passions of the person might never be heard. There is a need to trust the subject's own narrative – but have the courage to interpret, to dramatise and to be heard. I find that it helps to surround my study with family photographs from youth to old age – to be looking at my subject in the eye through from birth to twilight years.

Following the subject's life cycle is essential. I trace childhood and youth, drawing from school and university experiences, through to love stories and twilight years. Some insights can be gained from studying birth, death and marriage certificates as well as divorce papers, probates and wills. I use these documents as background material only as they often contain highly sensitive personal details. Inevitably the main thrust is the subject's work. I try to recreate their daily routines – hours spent at work, recreation and home life. In the workplace I focus on not just their achievements but on the intended and unintended consequences of their decisions. My task is to posthumously shape their contribution.

Biographers are faced with analysing eulogies, homilies and obituaries. By their very nature these records are laudatory pieces. Seldom do you find any derogatory comments. It is important to look at not only at what they say but what they leave out. I recently read an obituary of a notorious serial killer who had gone on to commit murder whilst incarcerated. The writer skipped over his criminal life and focused on his rehabilitation. Apparently he had studied horticulture by correspondence and established a prison garden. The piece finished with praising his ability with cut flowers with no reference to cut throats. This irony may have been lost on many readers.

One of the essential requirements is a sympathetic and constructively critical first reader whose opinion you respect. Relinquishing your draft to a valued external reader who knows nothing about the topic helps you distance yourself from it. No matter what they say, it temporarily passes the responsibility. I find that this approach helps me

to find the energy to rewrite it, as I inevitably must do. It is nerve wracking, but is also such a relief. It also enables me to seek an independent view before handing the first draft to the sponsors.

The way in which you present your manuscript to the sponsors is important. It is a good idea to have each draft bound. By making the sponsors turn over the pages they begin to see the writing as a book. I encourage them to add sticky notes and write on the pages opposite the text. This process provides a speedy method for identification of changes and inclusions. Similarly, when I do the final draft, I photocopy illustrations and glue them opposite the pages of the text. This minimises the surprises and hopefully cuts down on last minute changes.

### Publishing biographies

Reviewers are usually people who would have been poets, historians, biographers, if they could; they have tried their talents at one or at the other, and have failed; therefore they turn critics.

SIR JOHN COLERIDGE, BARON COLERIDGE (1820-1894)  
*Letters on Shakespeare and Milton*

A writer needs to respect the audience. Good design is central to the success of the project. The reality is that only a few people will read all of your words. Photographs and illustrations with informative and apposite captions draw the reader in. The layout, printing and style of the work should be inviting and user friendly. When the intended readers would, in the main, be elderly, the print size and font has to be accommodating. The sponsors for Sir Henry wanted a book that could be comfortably read in bed and we obliged. An index can determine whether a work rises or falls. Most readers want to access only the sections or people that they knew and this needs careful consideration. One alphabetical index that includes references to both the text and the illustrations works well.

A select bibliography, footnotes or endnotes are an essential part of the art. I am intrigued by the number of readers who dig into them: they recognise them as the archaeology of knowledge, a journey into other worlds that offers signposts for them to follow. All of this is immaterial if the work has not been expertly edited. The editor should be like an invisible mender – repairing the holes without ruining the cloth.

In the end the success of the project depends on the author. The elegance of the final galley proofs is reliant on the drive and qualities of the writer. Total immersion, dogged research, hard work, skilful narrative, deep respect for the subject, illumination of the themes tackled and compassion for the human dimension of history and achievement are all needed. Biographical writing is not for the faint-hearted.



Dead wood: stacks of old newspapers deteriorate in a basement of the State Library of Victoria in the middle of the twentieth century.  
PICTURE COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, ACCESSION NO. H27341

# THE 90-DAY ARCHIVE

Rachel Buchanan

The internet and associated digital technologies have given historians unparalleled access to the content of historic and contemporary newspapers both at home and abroad, but there is no equivalent archive of print's mongrel born-digital cousin, the online newspaper. Online newspapers are read by millions but collected by no one.

This article explores the reasons why no state or federal public institutions are yet systematically collecting online newspapers and it considers the broader significant challenges involved in archiving any kind of electronic born digital record. It argues that as newspapers are downsized or closed all together, online journalism will become even more important; multimedia online journalism might be the new 'first draft of history'. Therefore, it is essential – for historians and many other researchers – that these fragile, imperfect but significant digital records are preserved.

In her witty essay on archives, British historian Carolyn Steedman describes a record office as a repository of 'tiny flotsam' within 'the great, brown, slow-moving strandless river of Everything'.<sup>1</sup> Yet as every researcher knows, even this flotsam, even these little surviving scraps of the past, can be intimidating, voluminous and unmanageable. A single archival box can be packed with dozens of enormous, dusty files that leak and puff and exhaust.

Steedman's concern was with material remains, specifically bits of paper, but her equation is reversed in the case of digital records. The internet is 'a river of Everything', a largely uncatalogued, anarchic, ever-expanding archive of the now from which – it seems – only the tiniest flotsam of printed, audio or visual material is excluded.<sup>2</sup>

Archivists are struggling to work with electronic-born digital records. Louise Craven, head of cataloguing at the National Archives (UK) has recently written that these records 'pose considerable challenges in terms of storage and preservation and generate questions which strike at the very foundation of the archivist's profession: questions about authenticity, original order, the unique record, custody and meaning'.<sup>3</sup>

This article is concerned with one part of this struggle, the struggle to store and preserve newspapers, a tiny yet important eddy in this great, wide, flickering river of digital stuff. The internet and digital technologies mean historians and other researchers have unparalleled access to text-only and full-page versions of local and international contemporary and historic newspaper databases. It is conceivable that a current doctoral student will be able to do really

detailed newspaper research without ever having to thread a bit of microfiche through the dreaded reader.

When I started my PhD at Monash University in 2001, New Zealand's national library, the Alexander Turnbull, had just launched *Papers Past*, an exciting site that digitised nineteenth century newspapers. It was wonderful then but the site is even better now. Last year, it became fully text searchable so a researcher, such as myself, can type in the name of an ancestor and the system hunts through thousands of papers to bring up articles on your forbear. Technology allows a researcher to search and index at the same time.

The National Library in Australia has started a similar project, to provide full text historic Australian newspapers from 1803–1954 but coverage, at this early stage, remains partial.<sup>4</sup> Last September Google announced it was partnering with newspaper publishers 'to make old newspapers accessible and searchable'. Major Australian newspapers, such as *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, will apparently be included in this project but at the time of writing, in mid-July 2009, no formal announcement had been made. Google does, however, index and make searchable the National Library's historic newspaper database (go to the News Archives section of Google News).<sup>5</sup>

Other incredible online newspaper resources include well-known databases such as *Factiva* (text-only versions of articles from almost 9000 publications in 118 countries, published from 1990 onwards), and historical digital archives of *The Times* (London) from 1785–1985 and the *Sydney Morning Herald's* digital archive. There are also the less well-known resources such as *PressDisplay*, a '60-day archive' of full PDF versions of 500 newspapers

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It is conceivable that a current doctoral student will be able to do really detailed newspaper research without ever having to thread a bit of microfiche through the dreaded reader.

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Great Moments in Sport 1996

# THE AGE

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, Friday December 20 1996

NEWS | SPORT | BUSINESS | ENTERTAINMENT | COMPUTERS | EDUCATION



## Book of the Year

And the winner is ...



Racism row threatens universities' Malaysian plans



Jim Schembri interviews Geoffrey Rush



## EG's Christmas Comedy Guide

# THE AGE

## The fight for Fairfax

Murdoch: I'm out but Packer in

### VICTORIA'S \$3 BILLION CAR INDUSTRY UNDER A CLOUD

The Martin Bryant story The Telstra sale Victoria 2010: A special report

**GOOD WEEKEND: 52 Weekends Away**

animated advertising. They are read by millions but collected by no one.

Online newspapers, like many other born digital artefacts, have fallen into an archival black hole.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, this gap in collection activity didn't matter too much. Newspapers started to publish online versions of themselves in the mid to late 1990s. Back then, most of the content was either shovelware (unmodified stories taken from the paper version) or breaking news stories from wire services such as Australian Associated Press (AAP) or Reuters. But the situation is very different now. Readers and advertisers are deserting print for online, and media

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Online newspapers, like many other born digital artefacts, have fallen into an archival black hole.

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companies are scrambling to win clicks and then make these readers stick with the site long enough to be delivered a half a dozen advertising pitches or more. This hunt for clicks has blurred any remaining divisions between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers online, but there are signs that this might be changing. In June 2009, for example, Fairfax announced that it was relaunching *The National Times* as 'an opinion and editorial website'.<sup>8</sup>

Timely, original content is prized on news sites, and many news stories, blogs (with reader feedback) and photographs will only be published online. For example, all the initial reports on the horrendous firestorms that ripped through communities on Melbourne's fringes on 7 February were published online only.

As well as writing history, I now teach journalism. As a media studies academic, it would be very interesting to track online coverage of the bushfire story. How often were reports updated? What did they say? What sources were quoted? When did reader feedback start flowing in? When were message boards set up? Who posted there first?

I spoke with Frank Prain, then library technical services manager at *The Age*, where I used to work as a journalist.

Way, way back: this is the front page of the first online version of *The Age* (20 December 1996) collected in the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. Log on to the Internet Archive and type theage.com.au into the Wayback Machine's search engine to find more holdings. <http://web.archive.org/web/19961219182321/http://theage.com.au/> (accessed 14 August 2009)

from around the world (available free for registered users of the State Library of Victoria).

These developments revolutionise research, allowing us to gain new insights and make new connections with a speed and ease that was, until recently, not only unthinkable but also physically impossible.

However, there is one great and growing gap in newspaper archiving, and that is print's digital cousins. Online newspapers are mongrel, imperfect but interesting products at the messy frontier of new journalism practice.<sup>6</sup> They contain words, pictures (still and moving), maps, sound, raw and edited video, multimedia packages, blogs, links to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and lots of still and

I asked Prain about how many 'online only' stories were archived. I used the bushfires as an example.

'Say I wanted to track the online coverage of the bushfires, see how the story unfolded over the day?'

Prain laughed. 'Almost impossible,' he said.

The system is in flux. Before 2008, there was little or no formal archiving of online stories. By March 2009 Prain said the library received a 'fragment' of web-only stories to archive but by July the library was archiving many more stories – about 300 records a month.

Library of Australia or by state libraries either. 'Online newspapers are a big issue,' the National Library's manager of web archiving, Paul Koerbin, told me in 2008. 'We do not archive newspaper sites in Pandora at present. It is an issue of interest and concern for us and we are likely to have a closer look at it later this year.'<sup>10</sup>

There are many things that make it difficult to start collecting online newspapers. Some of these challenges are technical and they are shared by anyone who needs to preserve records that are no longer static, text-only



Selective memory is dangerous: a snapshot of the op-ed pages of *The Age*, 19 May 2009, including a lead opinion piece about the dangers of a lack of historical knowledge, is stored in *PressDisplay*'s 60-day archive. Registered users can access *PressDisplay* through the State Library of Victoria. See <http://library.pressdisplay.com.ezproxy.slv.vic.gov.au/pressdisplay/viewer.aspx> (accessed 19 May 2009).

Librarians processed the copy (which might include editing) and it was then stored in Fairfax's in-house archive, Fairfax Digital Collections (FDC). Prain retired at the end of July. By the end of August 2009, it was anticipated that all 'data-processing' of online stories would be outsourced to Pagemasters.<sup>9</sup>

FDC does not archive sound or pictures. It does not archive blogs either, but blogs do have their own internal archiving mechanism. It is expensive to collect and store converged media and *The Age* has finite resources. Simon Johanson, the editor of theage.com.au said: 'We tend to purge the system every two to three years.' Pictures were expunged first because they took up the most space. Articles were probably preserved on the system for five or six years.

Online newspapers are not collected by the National

documents. Government websites are one obvious case in point and literary archives are another.<sup>11</sup>

It is outside the scope of this article to consider the standards for web archiving and web construction, or the multiple challenges involved in preserving words, pictures and sounds that have been created in a range of electronic formats (using computer programs that can quickly become obsolete) but Gerard Collis' brilliant exploration of how the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Agency is preserving its records is instructive.<sup>12</sup>

One of the particular difficulties associated with archiving online newspaper is that they are not covered by the legal deposit provision in the *Copyright Act 1968*. The Act requires publishers, such as Fairfax or News Limited, to donate copies of their newspapers to government archives. There is no similar requirement



for online publications. Even if there were, how would a library decide on what it should actually collect?

The dynamics of newspaper publishing, the different daily editions that used to be commonplace, have always posed challenges for collecting institutions and for researchers. It was not uncommon, for example, for the now defunct *Herald* in Melbourne to have as many as five editions a day (the city extra, the late final, the late late final and so on). 'The library couldn't keep up with all the variant editions so many years ago the archive decided to collect the final edition,' said Tim Hogan, the State Library of Victoria's newspaper librarian.

But online newspapers explode the notion of an edition. They are updated minute-by-minute. A site like *The Age*, for example, publishes up to 10 different front-page photographs in a day. Online newspapers are also huge. Some web archivists estimate that it could take 'hours or days' to harvest a single edition of an online newspaper.<sup>13</sup>

While newspaper's content is neatly contained with column inches printed on paper, in online newspapers the borders are fuzzy and fluid. Their edges leach outwards and downwards, a rabbit-hole of information, entertainment, pop quizzes, animation and adverts, much of it provided by third parties and first published overseas. Often the content is duplicated and unoriginal.

'It's very messy in terms of archiving,' Koerbin said. 'What is the newspaper? Is it the content? The opinion? What do we want to capture?'

One possibility was to archive the front page of online papers, 'the first page of online material plus one level', at a set time each day. By June 2009, the library had started to do this with the smh.com.au, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* website. Koerbin said it was a small step towards archiving online newspapers. At the very least it would allow researchers to compare the front page of the printed paper with the online front page.<sup>14</sup> The National Library was also very interested in collecting online opinion writing – the blogs and the reader comments too.

The library does archive some online material in *Pandora*, the digital archive that started in 1996.<sup>15</sup> By mid-2008, *Pandora* had 19,307 titles containing 53,112,080 files which amounts to 2.2TB (terabytes) of data.<sup>16</sup>

*Pandora* is a curated collection. One portion is devoted to blogs.<sup>17</sup> The 197-site collection is a delightful archive of the political (for example, Andrew Norton's blog *Observations from Carlton's lone classical liberal and leftwrit*); the gritty (*Cablog*, Adrian Neyloan's blog of Sydney taxi stories); the crafty (*Loobyly*, aka craft-minded Melbourne mother of two Claire Robertson 'Loobyly is my scrapbook, my side-project, my brain-dump'); the medical (*Baggas' Blog*, the blog of Paul Baggaley, a Christian family doctor from Perth);

the sporty (the ABC's Beijing Olympics blog); and the literary (Sophie Cunningham, author and *Meanjin* editor).

'We select, scope, get permission, quality check and make it accessible. It's value-added. We do the best archiving we can given the limitations,' Koerbin said.

The antithesis of *Pandora* is the library's annual Australian domain harvest. Since 2005, the library has scrounged around for the funding to pay the American Internet Archive to crawl the web and collect every .au site in scope. In 2008, the target was a billion files, a doubling of the half a billion aimed for in 2007. It was the biggest crawl the Internet Archive had ever done, according to archive web group director Kris Carpenter Negulescu.<sup>18</sup>

The web changes the meaning of space and time. It deals in numbers so large they become ridiculous, unfathomable. The Internet Archive, a non-profit group set up in 1996, already contains a collection of 'almost two petabytes of data and is currently growing at the rate of 20 terabytes a month'.<sup>19</sup> Don't be fooled by that little digit. A petabyte

is '1000 terabytes' or 'one quadrillion bytes'. It was once considered to be an 'absurdly large bit of data' but is now not uncommon. The archive contains more text than the world's biggest library, the Library of Congress.

Data expands but time is compressed. In the computer industry, 10 years is equivalent to a millennium or two. Ten years ago is the time before

Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia, the time when an unknown company called Google had only eight staff.<sup>20</sup>

In the computer industry, 10 years ago is 'wayback' – hence the name of the Internet Archive's search engine, the Wayback Machine. It is possible to search the Wayback Machine and find some old (pre-2000) front pages of *The Age* online or any other online newspaper in the world but they are just the tiniest fragments of an imperfect but important new form of journalistic enterprise. Negulescu said the archive did not do any dedicated, ongoing crawls of newspaper sites but it collected newspaper content through national domain harvests (such as Australia's annual one) or in thematic collections, such as its Iraqi War collections.

It also relied on 'contributions to our collections from third parties who crawl the major newspaper sites from around the globe on a more frequent basis'. Most of these third parties wanted to remain anonymous. The exception was Alexa Internet (owned by book giant Amazon). Alexa was founded by Brewster Kahle at the same time as Kahle (and Bruce Gilliat) founded the Internet Archive. However, Negulescu said the archive was planning to begin dedicated, ongoing harvests of online newspapers this year 'given the state of the industry globally'.

Newspapers are in decline. Both News Corp and

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Newspapers are no longer papers of record but it is probably still possible to argue that journalists provide a first draft of history.

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Fairfax have cut journalism jobs in the past year but the cuts are not nearly as savage as those already imposed in America and the United Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> When I started in journalism in 1986, many newspapers still tried to be papers of record and report on everything of significance that happened in a single day in the area they covered. Perhaps it was this ambition that led to the popular saying that journalism is the first draft of history. Certainly journalism is 'most appreciated when it turns into a non-journalistic phenomenon', whether it be history, literary non-fiction, or even a television series (for example, the incredible HBO television series *The Wire* owes its power to the intense reporting work of one of its creators, former newspaper journalist David Simon).<sup>22</sup>

In Australia, the reporting and commentary of legendary World War I journalist C.E.W. (Charles) Bean, has certainly provided a rather long-lasting first draft of the Gallipoli campaign!

Newspapers are no longer papers of record but it is probably still possible to argue – especially when we think about breaking news cataclysms such as the Victorian bushfires – that journalists provide a first draft of history. These days, however, that draft is likely to include still and moving images and sound, and it is probably published on the net. These records are not being preserved. I think this matters now, and it will matter even more if newspapers do cease to exist as

fold-out paper objects. The internet is the most unstable of archives and private companies cannot be expected to store and preserve material of national significance.

As I said to the Internet Archives' Kris Negulescu: 'I think average users (for example, people like me) sort of assume that they'll always be able to find something once it's been published online. Is that so?'

He said: 'The short answer is no. IA's ultimate aim is to preserve everything, but it is our 'dream big' goal versus a realistic one in practice. On average, materials published on the web are replaced within 90 days of publication.'

### Postscript

This article was correct when I revised the final version (in August 2009) but perhaps by the time it is published, there will have been further developments in the archiving of 'born digital' multimedia newspaper content. I hope so. If internet journalism does become part of the collections of state and national archives, it will be crucial for historians to reconsider how they use *all* kinds of journalism as a source. Do historians read journalism as critically as we try and read other sources, such as files in government archives, or do we treat the words of journalists as uncomplicated eyewitness accounts or as uncomplicated reflections of the mindset of 'the public' or the mindset of 'the media' or of a particular media baron. Online journalism



Archival chaos: libraries such as the State Library of Victoria have struggled to store newspapers, as shown by these stacks in the basement of the Dome building. Now the challenge for archivists is how to define 'online' newspapers.

PICTURE COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, ACCESSION NO. H27351

is challenging journalistic codes of ethics. The speed with which online stories need to be filed is forcing print reporters to work faster too. The biggest change, I think, is a shift from the understanding of accuracy as something that is achieved by deadline – when the presses have to roll – to accuracy as something that evolves over time and multiple story updates.<sup>23</sup> If the

first online news report is incorrect, it can quickly be updated. As Sky News CEP Angelos Frangopoulos likes to say about reporting a breaking news story: 'You're not wrong for long.'<sup>24</sup> But once a story a particular version of a story is archived, it is wrong for a very long time indeed.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001, p. 18.
- <sup>2</sup> I say 'seem' because despite appearances apparently only four or five per cent of the 'world's knowledge' is online, a statistic that irks Google. Google founders estimate it will take 300 years to remedy this. See Randall Stross, *Planet Google: one company's audacious plan to organize everything we know*, New York, Free Press, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Louise Craven, 'Introduction', in Craven (ed.), *What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: a reader*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> National Library of Australia, *Australian newspapers*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2008, <<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>>, accessed 20 March 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> Personal communication, Annie Baxter, public relations manager Google Australia and New Zealand, 11 March 2009. For information on the National Library's newspaper digitisation project see Gideon Haigh, '3000 characters in search of content', *The Age*, A2, 16 May 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> For an exploration on online newspapers, especially *The Age* online, see Rachel Buchanan, 'Bare bones, speed freaks and sleaze: how online journalism is remaking newspapers from the inside out', peer-reviewed paper presented at Comparative Journalism Studies conference, University of Tasmania, June 2008. Full paper published online at: <[www.utas.edu.au](http://www.utas.edu.au)>. There are many examples of outstanding multimedia journalism published on online newspaper sites. One I really like is an audio slideshow: 'In Living Memory', a collaboration between *Sydney Morning Herald* chief photographer Andrew Meares and the Public Records Office, New South Wales, published to coincide with the Rudd Government's February 2008 apology to Aboriginal people and using photos from the Aborigines Welfare Board. Go to <<http://www.smh.com.au/multimedia/2008/national/in-living-memory/index.html>>.
- <sup>7</sup> This phrase is used by the digital archiving community. See Malcolm Gillies, 'Born digital born free? The cultural impact of the web', Keynote address to the Archiving Web Resources Conference, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 9 November 2004. See also Internet Archive, *About the internet archive*, Internet Archive, San Francisco, <<http://www.archive.org/about/about.php>>, accessed 3 March 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> Miriam Steffens, 'National Times set for online relaunch', *The Age*, 13 June 2009, p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> This company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Australian Associated Press (AAP). It provides 'centralised sub-editing centres' for newspapers and magazines, a move that many industry commentators have lamented. See Rachel Buchanan, 'Black and white and all over?', *The Age*, 25 August 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> Personal communication, Paul Koerbin, Manager Web Archiving, National Library of Australia, 11 April 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> Craven provides a useful overview of the multiple technical challenges now facing archivists and archive users. For literary archives see Jamie Andrews, 'Save, get, delete', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 March 2009, p. 15.
- <sup>12</sup> Gerard P. Collis, 'Permitted use and users: the fallout shelter's sealed environment' in Craven (ed.), op. cit., pp. 167–185.
- <sup>13</sup> Personal communication with Kris Carpenter Negulescu, Internet Archive, 4 March 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Paul Koerbin, 30 July 2009. See the *Sydney Morning Herald* at <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/subject/221>>. Archiving began in June 2009.
- <sup>15</sup> The National Library of Australia, *Pandora: Australia's web archive*, National Library of Australia and Partners, Canberra, updated July 2008, <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au>>, accessed 28 July 2009.
- <sup>16</sup> Edgar Crook, 'Web archiving in a web 2.0 world', paper presented to Dreaming 08 – Australian Library and Information Association Biennial Conference, Alice Springs, September 2008. Available online at *Pandora*, <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/papers.html>>, accessed 20 March 2009.
- <sup>17</sup> For a list of archived blogs go to *Pandora*, <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/subject/29>>, accessed 20 March 2009.
- <sup>18</sup> Negulescu, Internet Archive, 4 March 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> See Internet Archive, *Frequently asked questions*, <[www.archive.org/about/faqs/php](http://www.archive.org/about/faqs/php)>, accessed 20 March 2009. For a history of the archive see Michele Kimpton and Jeff Ubois, 'Year-by-year: from an archive of the internet to an archive on the internet' in Julien Masanes (ed.), *Web Archiving*, Springer, Berlin, 2007, pp. 210–212.
- <sup>20</sup> For a timeline of Google's development see Google, *Corporate Information: Google Milestones* <<http://www.google.com/corporate/history.html>>, accessed 20 March 2009.
- <sup>21</sup> For a summary of the global news industry see Jonathon Este et al, *Life in the Clickstream: the future of journalism*, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Redfern, 2008. This report is also available online at <[www.alliance.org.au/documents/foj\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.alliance.org.au/documents/foj_report_final.pdf)>. For an especially bleak view of the nature of British broadsheet journalism, see Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2008. At least one website is tracking newspaper closures. For American closures see Paul Gillan, *Newspaper death watch*, Boston, 2007, <<http://www.newspaperdeathwatch.com>>, accessed 28 July 2009.
- <sup>22</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy*, Sage, California, 2004, p. 1. This book also contains a very interesting discussion of how historians have worked with journalism. For an example of the reporting that helped make *The Wire* see David Simon, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, Edinburgh, Canongate, reprinted 2008.
- <sup>23</sup> For a good overview of some of the ethical challenges posed by online journalism see Cecilia Friend and Jane B. Singer, *Online Journalism Ethics: traditions and transitions*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> Greg Callaghan, 'Spreading the news', *The Weekend Australian*, 1–2 August 2009, p. 16.

# THE SILENCE OF 30,000 FILES

## Negotiation and change in writing a history of Consumer Affairs Victoria, 1964–2008

Amanda McLeod

Researching and writing a history of Consumer Affairs Victoria was anything but straightforward. The organisation was important because it represented a major shift in thinking about the consumer interest: that it should be manifest in government rather than left to the vagaries of the market. The challenges of this project raised the issue of what this history should do. It needed to tell the story of CAV but it also needed to place it in its historical context.

The book was commissioned at a watershed moment in consumer affairs; it was obvious from the outset that some of the ideas contained within it could make an important contribution to the wider debate about consumer affairs. This case study raises important questions for those engaged in commissioned or organisational histories who want to make a contribution to the field that extends beyond its immediate confines.

It was a seemingly straightforward project, to research and write a history of Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), the origin of which lay in the passage of the *Consumers Protection Act 1964* and the establishment of the Consumers Protection Council (CPC) the following year. The CPC was the first attempt by government to protect the interests of consumers in Australia. But the task was, of course, far from straightforward or uncomplicated. The organisation was important because it represented a major shift in thinking about the consumer interest: that it should be manifest in government rather than left to the vagaries of the market. The challenges, of which there were many, raised the question of what this history should do. It needed to tell the story of CAV but it also needed to place it in historical context (a context that is largely unwritten).

The book was commissioned at a watershed moment in consumer affairs; it was obvious from the outset that some of the ideas contained within this book could make an important contribution to the wider debate about consumer affairs. This case study raises important questions for historians engaged in commissioned or organisational histories. Placing the organisation in a wider social, political and economic context will do much to improve the standing of the discipline and the profession of history within the halls of commerce. Understanding an organisation's history can be an important facet in advocating for change. In making a contribution to the field, historians have an important part to play that extends beyond the organisation's immediate confines.

### Silence

The scholarly silence on the history of consumer policy and commerce in Australia is striking. Even when it is written, historians face what Coleman calls a 'Catch-22' because 'business history, by definition, must use the records of business companies'. Coleman writes:

The only way that business historians can normally get access to those records, however, is to be commissioned to write company histories. But if they go on writing company histories they are failing to write business history in the wider sense. So they are stuck with their 'single cases' and 'inveterate empiricism'.<sup>1</sup>

Cantor argues that some commissioning bodies 'see contract histories as celebrations of survival, or as vindications of the foresight of founders and patrons, while others lament freely to their contracted historian about the neglect of some obscure innovation, fact or individual'. But this does not just raise a problem for business history but for all history – the issue 'of institutional and ideological control by the dominant culture ... of turning history into a service industry'.<sup>2</sup> This dilemma is potentially more problematic for professional historians engaged in commissioned histories. Further compounding the problems of the commission, Cantor argues, is that sponsors 'have difficulty explaining why they want a history' and their superficial motives 'inevitably inform historical studies, whether they are imposed upon, or internalised by contract workers'.

Other writers have been concerned with the limitations of the 'case study' approach. Gourvish, for example, questions the 'notion that business history, like other forms of history, should turn to the social sciences for theoretical inspiration and guidance'.<sup>3</sup> Rather, he argues, 'case studies should seek to adopt whatever [approach] is relevant to challenge the assumptions of, and expose the limitations of the various models, and to extend their applicability'.<sup>4</sup> Case studies should not be confined by a theoretical viewpoint; narratives in a largely unwritten history offer a voice in the silence. Historians, unlike social scientists, are more comfortable borrowing from an eclectic body of theoretical approaches and are not any poorer for doing so. There is nothing inherent preventing commissioned historians from placing their subject in its social, political and economic contexts.

Like business histories, commissioned business histories have unfortunate – and perhaps unwarranted – connotations of being more public relations or self-congratulatory exercises than serious scholarly inquiry. But, as many significant works have demonstrated, they have the power to be far more. Writers such as McCalman and Storrs have shown organisational histories can be more than specific genre histories. McCalman used her examination of Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital to write a social history of women's health.<sup>5</sup> Storrs, in her history of the National Consumers' League in the United States, contributed a fuller understanding of the history of feminism, labour policy and welfare reform of the New Deal.<sup>6</sup> While these works were not commissioned by a key stakeholder or vested interest, it is worth considering the advantages to both the organisation and the wider field of history of a work that places its subject in the context of the wider social, political and economic debates. If the subject of the history and the wider community want to learn important lessons from the past we need to critically analyse, not just report or reproduce.

Organisational histories have been largely ignored in recent years in Australia.<sup>7</sup> 'As agents of radical change', Davison writes, modern managers 'consciously avoid too close a sense of connection with the organisation of its past. Eradicating institutional memory is a conscious method of control'.<sup>8</sup> Davison laments the emergence of a form of historical amnesia among managers:

Half a century ago, history was a vital ingredient in the education of the statesman and public administrator. Understanding the history of the nation and its institutions and of how they have changed, retracting and analysing past episodes of change, knowing how to interpret social and political behaviour, developing a capacity to critically

evaluate information and formulate judgements in clear prose – these were the capacities that history was expected to instil in its students, and which the history graduate might bring to the world of business, public administration or politics. Underlying this process of education was the belief that the world of the past was continuous with our present, and that the lessons learned from history were applicable to the present and the future.<sup>9</sup>

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### Understanding an organisation's history can be an important facet in advocating for change.

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This belief is, writes Davison, 'now almost universally denied' among modern managers. 'The world, it is now suggested, has changed so completely that yesterday's experience is no longer applicable to today'. Yet the historian has much to offer the study of organisations. Despite the silence, Davison notes that a few managers 'have commis-

sioned organisational histories as a step in the process of bureaucratic reform'.<sup>10</sup> It is with this intent that Dr David Cousins, the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria (2002–2008), commissioned a history of that organisation in 2007.

#### **A commissioned history**

The book – *A Fair Deal: A History of Consumer Affairs Victoria* – was intentionally commissioned at a watershed moment for consumer policy and with obvious political motives: to contribute to the debate and to the development of national consumer policy. Victoria has been a leader in consumer policy and legislative reform and, as moves are made towards a national consumer law, Cousins wanted this history of CAV to make an important contribution to the future restructure of the Victorian body and also to the wider consumer policy debate. What place might be left for state-based consumer agencies if a single uniform consumer law is enacted?

Consumer Affairs Victoria, under Cousins' leadership, was more sensitive to the value of learning lessons from the past than it would have been under most modern managers.<sup>11</sup> Cousins commissioned a number of significant research reports and looked to the work of the first Director of Consumer Affairs, Norman Geschke, in an effort to understand specific aspects of CAV's constituencies.<sup>12</sup> 'The annual report', wrote Cousins in 2007, 'is more than just an historical record. It is a means of highlighting, to the Parliament and the public, issues and concerns about the operation of consumer markets in Victoria.'<sup>13</sup> He was also acutely aware that consumer policy was inherently political and his commissioning of the history of Consumer Affairs Victoria was a deliberate action in contributing to the political debate. History was, for Cousins, more than

a record of events; it also had the potential to raise issues and advocate for change.

It is important to note that I, too, was not a neutral observer. I had conducted my doctoral research into consumerism and consumer protection and was contracted because of my expertise and training. I was therefore interested in contributing to knowledge both in the academic and more public arenas. Given my research into the history of consumerism I could see the significance of current developments and the importance for the Victorian story to be told and recognised nationally. The history of CAV could be of interest and importance to those beyond the Victorian consumer agency. Understanding the past will help us to understand the barriers to implementing good consumer policy in the future.

In formulating the research project I needed to incorporate not only the agenda of the sponsor but also my own. This commissioned history offered the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of consumers' access to justice and by focusing on the changing notion of 'fair' I was able to uncover the political perspective underpinning consumer policy. During the 1970s, for example, fair came to mean balancing the interests of both consumers and traders. With the election of the Labor Government in 1982 fair trading had social justice connotations. By the 1990s, the Kennett Government's version focused on uncompetitive conduct that was 'unfair' to reputable traders. The flexible notion of 'fair' trading provides a lens through which to view consumer policy that adds a new dimension to our understanding of the dominant paradigm: consumer capitalism.

Despite arguments put forward that suggest commissioned histories are necessarily limited in scope by the controlling forces of the commissioning body, it was not Cousins' brief that placed unnecessary restrictions on this history. Rather, a more systemic attitude towards history that was uncovered during the research shaped the kind of history that could be written. Davison argues that:

If history was regarded seriously by business schools it would be hard to explain why departments of economic history have almost ceased to exist in Australian universities, and why business and government organisations have recently begun to destroy their libraries and archives.<sup>14</sup>

Initial investigations suggested that many of the records relating to the early history of the organisation, as a result of the lack of interest in its origins, had been lost or destroyed during various office relocations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a few longsighted employees had salvaged what they could carry when they moved offices and buildings, but many of the records had simply 'disappeared' or had been

deliberately tagged for destruction. Staff lamented the loss of a separate Consumer Affairs identity that was symbolised by the loss of its library when the Ministry was absorbed by the Department of Justice in 1992, but little was said about the removal of documents.

The holdings of the former Ministry of Consumer Affairs' library were to be retained within the new Department of Justice library. When I began my research I found a significant number of important policy documents, but as time went on material started to be removed from the library shelves. This act, of which Director David Cousins was unaware, highlighted the lack of interest in history within the wider organisation. The historical antecedents of current practices, and the battles won and lost, have not been of concern to the bulk of managers beyond their historical novelty. Staff concluded that because the material had been little consulted, it was not needed and would not be in the future. Its ultimate destination, beyond its holding cell in a library cupboard, was not known (for what did it matter if it was outdated and unwanted), but I was able to stall its fate until I had finished my research. My experience confirms Davison's assertion that management and record keepers believe that the organisation 'has changed so completely that yesterday's experience is no longer applicable to today'.<sup>15</sup>



Dr David Cousins, Director Consumer Affairs Victoria, 2002–2008, who commissioned *A Fair Deal: A History of Consumer Affairs Victoria*. CONSUMER AFFAIRS VICTORIA, ANNUAL REPORT, 2008

### 30,000 files

Versions of the past lay somewhere in the 30,000 files held at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) but the limitations of off-site access made it more difficult to locate than if a library with an archive and an archivist had been retained. Although I was granted almost unfettered access to the archival holdings at PROV (VPRS 8890/P/1), these records had been little consulted by external researchers and consultants and, accordingly, the finding aid did not give the desired ease of access I had hoped for. The PROV retrieval system left much to be desired. 'Open' records – those that the public has unrestricted access to – presented challenges that paled into insignificance when compared with those of 'closed' status. Each organisation is limited to retrieving 20 boxes at a time and they are only able to be viewed offsite. In this case, it meant 20 boxes for the entire mega-



John Lolas PSM joined Consumer Affairs Victoria in the early 1970s and is one of CAV's longest serving employees. Now Senior Conciliator in the Dispute Resolution Branch, Lolas was awarded a Public Service Medal in 2009 'for outstanding public service in the development of consumer rights protection in Victoria and in establishing a standard of excellence in conciliation services' (Australia Day honours list 2009).

CONSUMER AFFAIRS VICTORIA, ANNUAL REPORT, 2008

Department of Justice, of which Consumer Affairs Victoria is a part. This meant that retrieval for research purposes was extremely limited, an issue further confounded by not knowing the contents of each unit. Despite the 'historical importance' in 'representing the formation of Consumer Affairs in Victoria' and its 'initial policies and procedures' these records were also retained because of their potential to be 'used as evidence, [by] consumers, traders or employees of Consumer Affairs'.<sup>16</sup> It seemed that the retrieval structure would favour the latter. I, too, lamented the loss of the Consumer Affairs' library.

How best to approach the 30,000 files to siphon out the landmark developments from the internal functions of the organisation? It was of little value to sift through the complaint files, for example; without quantitative analysis – of which I have little training – these offered little beyond illumination of how consumer transactions pinched the hip-pocket nerve (however sensitive that nerve proved to be).<sup>17</sup> A history of the various management structures that replicated organisational charts may be of interest to a few administrators but of little interest to the majority of the potential audience. Without examining the wider history of administration, which was outside the scope of this work, this would have merely presented a disembodied case study.

After much deliberation about how long it would take to retrieve, view and analyse 30,000 files, it quickly became apparent that a different approach was needed in order to do this history justice. I turned instead to the policy documents, the major review inquiries, public submissions, annual reports and working papers and, guided by my CAV contacts, I was able to illuminate the hidden themes and key issues that confronted, and continue to confront, CAV.

Given the dearth of scholarly analysis and the limitations of the archival holdings, I was able to clarify what this history could and could not do. If a large body of secondary literature existed this history could have focused on filling the gaps in the historical record. But writing a history in an area that is largely unwritten needs to examine both the external as well as the internal contexts.

### Change

The examination of the body of official documents revealed more than the key themes and philosophical ideas underpinning consumer affairs policy. In seeking to chart the changes that had occurred throughout its 40-year history, it was the issue of change itself that emerged as a key theme. In almost every annual report, the successive directors made mention of the challenges faced by the Ministry in dealing with the rapidly changing circumstances

occurring in the consumer market. Their reports suggested that new approaches were constantly needed if the Ministry was to adapt, remain current, and best serve consumers and traders into the future. Indeed, the Public Service Board 'Management Review of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs' in 1982 recommended that the Ministry 'move-on' from its preoccupation with protection and compliant solving which had been its *raison d'être* since its establishment in the mid-1960s. Its links to its past, the Review concluded, had become a 'straitjacket from which the Ministry has found it difficult to break out'.<sup>18</sup> While Consumer Affairs and the Public Service Board were aware of the origins of Consumer Affairs, the past was blamed for current predicaments. The organisation, it seemed, could not look forward by looking back!

The successive directors did not acknowledge that it was the issue of change that remained, and continues to remain, a constant concern. This 'historical amnesia' is, of course, not limited to Consumer Affairs Victoria. How best to meet future demands while attending to current issues continues to be the bane of those working in consumer policy more generally; legislation, for example, often lags behind the need for it.

The Liberal Government had never wanted Consumer Affairs to be a complaints handling agency, but due to a lack of political will that left it with vague functions and objectives that did not specifically prohibit the Consumers Protection Council from assuming that role, consumers – with nowhere else to go – turned to it in increasing numbers.<sup>19</sup> Despite the concerns of successive governments, consumers continued to expect Consumer Affairs would solve their complaints. Handling complaints was one area of policy that would remain a constant function in the changing circumstances of the consumer market.

## Conclusion

While modern managers have largely ignored the histories of their organisations, they may be forced to uncover the lessons of the past as change and uncertainty are recognised as key features of the market. We are bombarded with media reports of the 'uncharted territory' of the 'worst global crisis since the Great Depression'.<sup>20</sup> But the history of business is a history of uncertainty and adaptation to changing circumstances. The 'Long Boom' of the post-war period, for example, was only labelled thus from the point of view of hindsight; business during this period was done under the shadow of war and the legacy of the Great Depression, and the 1960s credit squeeze threatened to bring an end to the economic prosperity

of the post-war years.<sup>21</sup> Business history has much to teach those given the task of dealing with the legacy and continuance of change.

Consumer policy's relationship to the social, economic and political fabric is, perhaps, more transparent than many of the subjects tackled by the professional historian. But it is worth considering how the commissioned history's key themes fit into a wider context. This will not only open up the potential for new audiences and markets; it will make a powerful contribution to the field of business history. A

good commissioned history is one that resonates beyond its immediate subject. Such intent should be important for the commissioning of future investigations. It has the potential to further improve the standing of professional historians and might appeal to the commissioning body. The importance of an organisation's past in understanding its present and its future is all the more important if change is one of its continuing challenges.

Davison suggests that without institutional memory business is condemned to fail when new (old) challenges present themselves. He argues that 'more enlightened managers might look to history to help conserve, rather than systematically destroy, institutional memory. History might heighten the manager's sense of the complexity of social and institutional change'. Most importantly 'it brings the corrective of experience to the confidence of dogma'.<sup>22</sup> Business history and histories of public institutions and organisations, write Warren and Tweedale, have an even greater potential benefit by supporting business to 'find its role as an integral part of a humane society, which can only truly flourish in terms of the quality of life of all its citizens'.<sup>23</sup>

If modern managers have 'forgotten' why history (and historical method) matters, we have a duty as historians to help explain what historical inquiry can offer the present and the future. A commissioned history that goes beyond the isolation of the organisation to contextualise its history, its present and its future offers more than a chronology of disembodied events and reminiscences. Such a history will be of value not only to the commissioning body, its employees and consumers but also to professional historians who are still vying for legitimacy within the halls of commerce.

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs reported in 1984 that 'If it is to be relevant to its ever changing environment, consumer policy must take into account all aspects of consumer life styles as they are reflected in the economic, social and political sphere'.<sup>24</sup> It seems almost self-evident that a history that does the same will be of most benefit and of greatest relevance.

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A good commissioned history is one that resonates beyond its immediate subject.

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# THE TROPE OF THE TORP

## Intangible heritage and the agreed fiction of Waverley Park

Robert Pascoe

In 2000 the City of Greater Dandenong was inspired to hire a team of historians and architects to advocate the declaration of Waverley Park as a heritage site. The case was – to the shock of all concerned – a success, and it set new benchmarks for cultural heritage in Australia. The ground and its main stand were saved from demolition and became the training facility for Hawthorn, the 2008 AFL premiers.

This paper offers some thoughts on how public historians might persuade committees charged with determinations of an historical kind to endorse our narratives. In these contexts, historians need to speak in a language that makes sense to such committees, and not necessarily present a considered scholarly view. The manner in which they put their case is as important as the content, as all committees operate according to their own agreed fiction; the results of the committee's deliberations might be quite different from what an 'objective' reading of the past would predict.

At the commencement of the 2009 season in Australian football, the premiership flag fluttered atop the Kenneth Luke Stand at Waverley Park in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. This imposing edifice, clearly visible from the Monash Freeway, is now the headquarters of the Hawthorn Football Club, the 2008 premiers, under the presidency of retired politician Jeff Kennett. A decade earlier, when Kennett was the premier of Victoria, he declined to support the community group fighting to save Waverley Park from demolition and sale for residential subdivision by its then owners, the Australian Football League (AFL). This historical irony has not passed unnoticed.

Waverley Park, originally known as VFL Park, was the suburban football ground built by the Victorian Football League (VFL), the forerunner of the AFL. It had opened in 1970 and for two decades was the League's showcase stadium. A match that reflected well on the football competition was originally scheduled there each Saturday afternoon; subsequently it became the home ground for both Hawthorn and St Kilda. The Waverley Park ground was located near the demographic centre of Melbourne and had the convenience of a large car park. The looming grandstand, named after former VFL president, Sir Kenneth Luke, was built at the ground



The Sir Kenneth Luke Stand memorialised a visionary football chief whose foresight led to the construction of the stadium.

IMAGE COURTESY HERITAGE VICTORIA

later. The oval was irrigated using a nearby artificial lake.

When various forces conspired to bring about Waverley Park's demise in 1999, its retention was not supported by the football establishment. For example, not one football journalist argued for keeping it. Nonetheless, some local community activists urged that the old ground be saved, and that it could only be saved if it could be shown to have a demonstrable heritage value under the *Heritage Act 1995*. The City of Greater Dandenong formally made the case for the heritage listing of Waverley Park, above the signature of its Chief Executive Officer.

Greater Dandenong was an unlikely white knight. The proposal for a heritage listing did not enjoy the support of Monash City, the local government area in which Waverley Park was located, presumably because of the economic value of the stadium being demolished and the land subdivided. Even the state branch of the Australian Labor Party, which had campaigned for saving Waverley Park during the 1999 state election, turned its back on the ground once Steve Bracks had, against all odds, replaced Jeff Kennett as Premier. For the record,

Kennett at no time favoured Waverley Park's retention.

An unlikely coalition of 150 local activists made up the Save Waverley Park group, meeting at the Mulgrave McDonalds under the leadership of Darryll Cavanagh, a manager at the local branch of Bosch. Prominent members of the group included Roz Blades, a councillor at Greater Dandenong, and Judy Carlisle.<sup>1</sup>

The case for a portion of Waverley Park to be preserved on the grounds of its 'cultural

heritage' was a turning point in the larger story of the conservation movement in Australia. The dust has long settled on the case; the arguments about intangible cultural heritage have moved on and become more complicated, and new experts have entered the field. Given the traditional gap between matters aesthetic and activities athletic, many heritage architects were surprised by the Waverley Park decision and some still remain unconvinced of football's enduring significance in the lives of their fellow Australians. The activists involved in the community campaign did not benefit politically from this success, and declined to be quoted at length in this article.

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### The case for Waverley Park to be preserved on the grounds of its 'cultural heritage' was a turning point in the conservation movement in Australia.

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The Heritage Committee accepted that taking football away from the cramped inner-urban cricket grounds to a suburban location was profoundly significant. The last official AFL match at Waverley Park, shown here, was played in 1999. IMAGE © NEWSPIX/SIMON DALLINGER



On wet days the fans could take shelter under cover at the back of the stands. IMAGE COURTESY HERITAGE VICTORIA

**Observation one: public arguments often take place in a language that is not of the historian's choosing.**

The arguments that persuaded the Registrations Committee of the Heritage Council to enter Waverley Park on the Council's list of protected places were not at all based on a detailed understanding of the experience of the fans at this football ground. The historians called in as expert witnesses in such cases must accept that the testimony that produces a successful outcome is not necessarily the same evidence that they would marshal in a scholarly publication on the same matter.

The Registrations Committee comprised: an experienced cultural historian, Andrew Lemon, as its chair; the chair of the Heritage Council, Catherine Heggen; a leading silk, John Dwyer QC; Geoff Sutherland; and Peter Williams. None of them claimed much knowledge of Australian football. The committee sat on six days during 2000: 22 and 23 June, 18 and 19 July, and 1 and 15 August.

The nominator was the chief executive officer of the City of Greater Dandenong. The team of experts was headed by heritage architect Nigel Lewis and sports historian Roy Hay. My own (minor) role was to stand in for Hay while he was absent in June, and to offer an introduction to the social history arguments as I understood them. Hay has co-written two articles on the case that elucidate what he took to be the key issues involved.<sup>2</sup>

I wanted to offer a more cultural account, one that conveyed the importance of football at this ground to the supporters who turned up week after week to watch

their heroes perform. I was, however, unsure of the language used in such hearings. Fortunately I was not listed to speak and be cross-examined until the second day of the hearing, so I sat in on the hearing throughout the Thursday, listening and watching carefully as the five members of the panel heard the evidence for and against the architectural argument. I noted that their attention was most fully engaged whenever they were presented with pictorial material. Whenever they were confronted with printed text lacking visual support their eyes glazed over. It was also clear that between them they had not attended many football matches, let alone been to a game played at Waverley Park. When the day's hearing was done I rushed across the street to a stationers, armed myself with overhead transparency paper and hurried home to print off all the significant images of the ground's history I could think of.

My presentation began at 10.35 am on the Friday and finished at 1.10 pm. During that time I spoke to these images and then took questions from the panel. My presentation offered three main arguments for the significance of Waverley Park in the history of Australian Rules football: it is significant in the modern development of the game; it has emotional significance for particular groups of supporters; and it has entered the language of Australian Rules football.

In outlining the first of these arguments, I introduced the metaphor of the 'decoupling':

The fundamental reason for establishing Waverley (as VFL Park) was to decouple football from cricket. The cricket authorities had controlled almost all the football grounds and could thus hold the VFL to ransom on many issues. This has been a source of conflict between the two sports for more than a century. Waverley Park not only decoupled football from cricket, however; it also decoupled the League from the individual clubs. Waverley Park therefore was significant as a double de-coupling in the game's administration, with profound consequences for Australian football.<sup>3</sup>

Two clubs, in particular, I argued, made Waverley Park a successful home ground, and for them the ground had emotional significance:

Waverley Park became the home ground of two Victorian clubs that were in danger of extinction with the development of the new national competition at the end of the 1980s. The survival of Hawthorn and St Kilda – an iconic win for Victorian football – owed much to their decisions in 1990 and 1993 to move to Waverley Park. It is no exaggeration to say that in the 1990s Victoria might have lost three clubs, rather than only one (Fitzroy) if it had not been for Waverley Park.

The relative popularity of Waverley Park is well evidenced by the attendance figures which show it attracted above-average crowds consistently. This was true both when it was used to showcase the premier game of the round (in the 1970s and 1980s)

and also when it was home to Hawthorn and St Kilda (in the 1990s). These clubs had been nomadic (in the case of Hawthorn) or in grossly inadequate facilities (St Kilda's Linton Street oval).

Finding a home for their clubs was obviously of great importance. Hawthorn's supporter base grew to the point where its members could successfully resist the proposed merger with Melbourne in 1996. These and other supporters liked Waverley because it is easy to drive to, easy to enter and find a seat, and the seats are designed so that families can stretch out and relax quite comfortably. Rainy afternoons are never a problem because the back stands are under cover. It is a friendly ground, ideal for old and young, male and female. Australian football has always attracted a higher percentage of female supports than any other code of football in the world, and Waverley is ideally suited to accommodating all family members.<sup>4</sup>

My third and final argument was that Waverley Park had entered the language of the game:

Australian football is one of the only sports whose language is comic. Most sport is meant to be described in serious language, but Australian football reporting has always had a larrikin quality. Waverley contributed to that rich language. The Hawthorn supporters formed Glee Clubs, groups of young people who clustered at the back of the main bays with their own songs, chants and jokes. Professional comedians made jokes about 'Arctic



With its long benches, families could relax in the wide open spaces of Waverley Park seating. IMAGE COURTESY HERITAGE VICTORIA

Park' and the ground's Orwellian qualities.

The ground also has good acoustics. To some extent, in fact, the old suburban tradition of the voice from the back of the crowd was revived at Waverley. Inner-suburban grounds had become far more controlled and controlling in their use of seating. Waverley was an alternative, a return to the days of free speech and vigorous good-natured banter.<sup>5</sup>

The second and third of these arguments were supported by the Save Waverly Park group members who attended the hearings, and the group's president, Darryll Cavanagh, was given the right to address the committee. These arguments, which we might describe as intrinsic to the experience of being in a football crowd, remained *terra incognita* for the committee.

In the explanatory notes attached to its Statement of Cultural Heritage Significance, the Heritage Council Registration Committee explicitly rejected this line of argument:

The Committee ... could not accept propositions based on the idea that particular games or use of the ground by particular teams or emotional attachment to the ground by particular supporters gave Waverley Park any greater significance than other football grounds.

However, the extrinsic or public value of the ground, in terms of its role in the institutional history of football, was the deciding factor:

It did accept that the practice of removing major games from local grounds to [the] former VFL Park did mark a very profound change in the competition and opened up the way for many further developments in Australian Rules football, some of them highly controversial.<sup>6</sup>

**Observation two: a pithy and memorable phrase or word can become freighted with considerable significance in such cases.**

This was the notion I had described as a 'double decoupling'. The image of 'decoupling' continued to reverberate in the discussions about this celebrated case in the months and years that followed. This expression turned out to be convenient shorthand for the significance of Waverley Park, so much so it continues to be borrowed to this day.<sup>7</sup>

**Observation three: the manner in which the past is contested is as important as the content.**

Coincidentally, a former student of mine, Patrick Miller, presented the case for the Executive Director of the Heritage Council at the hearing and he subsequently told me that, in his private view, the AFL made several blunders in its case: 'The AFL's first blunder was to fight

the registration.'<sup>8</sup> The same team of consultants retained by the AFL was used two years later by the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) to nominate the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for heritage listing, using similar arguments of that ground's 'spiritual' or 'sacred site' significance. They played down arguments about the existing architecture in favour of a 'palimpsest' approach to significance 'by pointing to all the successive layers that have come and gone while the true significance has remained (and would continue to remain once the old Members was demolished)'.<sup>9</sup>

When the MCC nomination was duly advertised there were no objections and no meeting of the Heritage Council was even required. The nomination coincided with legislation being enacted for the Commonwealth Games that allowed any demolition the Club wanted; at the same time it was able to talk up the heritage significance of the Ground itself!

In the Waverley Park case, the AFL showed none of the finesse in which the MCC excels. Instead, their attitude was 'Oh, come now, you can't be serious', hardly an approach that would endear it to the public.

The next real blunder by the AFL was to demand five hearing days, because the usual Heritage Council registration hearing takes one day.



Hawthorn player Chance Bateman. Finding a home at Waverley Park in 1990 was significant to Hawthorn Football Club, boosting the club's supporter base and helping to resist a proposed merger with Melbourne in 1996.



The Waverley Park housing estate is designed around remnant tree stands and the original car park thoroughfares.  
IMAGE COURTESY MIRVAC

Instead they did the lawyer thing of trying to demolish every point. In my estimation all that did was to make the committee give close attention to points that they were probably of a mind to dismiss without further thought if time had been pressing. Over the days of hearing I watched them, on the issue of registering Waverley Park, go from mild hostility to mild interest to expertise in the history and social significance of football. There's some truth in the old adage that there's no smoke without fire and the committee seemed to decide that if the issues caused so much interest and argument, then there must be something there.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their legal win, the underlying aim of both the City of Greater Dandenong and the Save Waverley group, that the AFL fixture continue to include matches at the stadium, was not met. Neither the Heritage Act nor any other legislation was ever capable of delivering this outcome. A similar issue arose with the Esplanade Hotel in St Kilda: even if it were added to the register of historic places for its role in the development of Australian contemporary music, the owners could not be compelled to keep hiring bands to perform there.

The case for Waverley Park was as much a turning point in the history of heritage as the ground itself had been in the 'double decoupling' of the game from grounds owned locally and from individual football clubs. Some of the ramifications of the case were: the Heritage Council resolved not to let outside parties dictate the manner of its own hearings; the public was offered a glimpse of heritage as constituting more than stuffy Victorian-era buildings; assumptions about the negative financial



Waverley Park stadium and oval are the focal point of the Mirvac development. IMAGE COURTESY MIRVAC

impact of heritage listing were now questioned; and it was realised that the Heritage Act is not a particularly good instrument for protecting intangible heritage. The inside view of an experienced heritage professional like Patrick Miller can help to clarify the actions and decisions made in the public domain.<sup>11</sup>

The AFL (naturally enough) opposed the decision. They proceeded to sell the ground to the developer Mirvac in December 2001. Mirvac agreed to the requirement to retain the grandstand and the oval as the centre-piece of a new housing estate. Hawthorn, the one club of the 16 that did not unreservedly support the demolition of Waverley Park, then decided to quit its inner-urban Glenferrie Oval base and move into Waverley Park, adding training facilities to a refurbished Sir Kenneth Luke grandstand.

In her 2002 *Annual Report* of the Heritage Council, the outgoing chair, Catherine Heggen, singled out Waverley Park as one of the half dozen significant deliberations in her four years in the role.<sup>12</sup>

The new registration, as set down in 2003, continues to emphasise the 'cultural significance' of Waverley Park, but does not employ that term; this was the phrase tossed around on the sea of public chatter in August–September 2000, almost to the point of ridicule.<sup>13</sup> How could a ground so beset with woes be thought of as 'cultural', the *hoi polloi* puzzled. Earlier in 2000, when the Council's executive director, Ray Tonkin, used the phrase 'social heritage' in arguing that the registration had a *prima facie* basis for endorsement, his phrase was seized by the representatives of Monash Council in opposing the application for heritage registration.

The Mirvac development was compelled to follow the heritage registration. The oval has been maintained, though now trimmed in size to emulate the MCG ground dimensions (the MCG measures 159 metres in length and 136 in width; Waverley Park used to be considerably bigger, 180 metres by 142 metres). In 2001 Mirvac paid \$100m for the 80-hectare site with the capacity for 1,500 dwellings. Although the

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The historian's voice is only one among many, and appeals to the past can result in quite unexpected outcomes.

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Waverley Park development does not look particularly inspiring from the Monash Freeway, there is a strong sense of an urban enclosure around the oval. So-called 'oval-side' houses command a higher price than their neighbours, one selling in 2008 for \$885,000.<sup>14</sup> The subdivision follows the layout of the original car park and retains the stands of trees that shielded the car park

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The Freedman-Jack mural captures a hallowed image of the six VFL matches that were played on Saturday afternoons every winter from 1896. IMAGE COURTESY HERITAGE VICTORIA

on its western edge. The lake that waters the oval has also been maintained. The street names honour English cricket grounds and the original architect (Reg Padey). Facing the oval, on the other side of the stand, looms the 2008 statue of Hawthorn coach John Kennedy, sculpted by Louis Laumen (the sculptor of the well-known MCG statues).

The original mural at Waverley Park, on the northern face of the Sir Kenneth Luke Stand, has also been maintained. It is a moment frozen in time with the 12 member clubs of the VFL represented. The mural was the work of Harold Freedman and his partner David





Jack, a prominent Melbourne team of designer and muralist whose other works include the *Cavalcade of Transport* at Southern Cross railway station, the *History of Racing* at Flemington Racecourse, and the Eastern Hill Fire Station exterior. The Waverley Park mural measures 10.9 by 4.8 metres wide, and consists of 126,000 pieces. Two players from each of the 12 original VFL clubs are depicted, as well as some other players of heroic stature, including Dermott Brereton. The cost of the mural was \$80–90,000. The mural manages to convey the energy and grace of individual players within the structure of the old 12-team competition. With the mural composed as six pairs of rival players, it is something of an epitaph to the old days of six matches on a Saturday afternoon.

The closing of Waverley Park has entered the folklore of football as one of the League's major blunders. A 2007 article by Daryl Timms on the issue in the *Herald Sun* attracted 15 responses from bloggers in just over two hours.<sup>15</sup> By 2005 all of the old inner-suburban grounds were facing demolition or drastic makeovers.<sup>16</sup> Local councils or grass-roots organisations contemplating putting the case for the retention of particular ovals were discouraged by the after-effects in Greater Dandenong politics.

The decision of Greater Dandenong to pursue the quixotic quest of calling the football establishment to account on the Waverley Park issue reverberates in local municipal politics. The campaign certainly cost more than was originally planned; this impost has remained in the political memory of Greater Dandenong, and has been used as an excuse to forestall exciting new initiatives ever since. In the context of what went on, the Save Waverley Park group gave a lot; it is important

to salute the devotion of this group. Ian Dicker, then President of Hawthorn Football Club, also did a great job for the club. Hawthorn insiders joke that the club profited twice – a share of funds from the sale, and funds from Mirvac to relocate there! The effect across the whole south east of metropolitan Melbourne was profound. It was a community-run campaign, which was decried by most of the football media. Although the case was won, the expenses and political risks involved have not been forgotten.

**Observation four: the historian's voice is only one among many, and appeals to the past can result in quite unexpected outcomes.**

Heritage arguments are an agreed fiction in the sense that they follow a narrative that finds agreement between the author and the readership. Waverley Park is a good example of the many ambiguities in writing this kind of fiction.

## Acknowledgments

The author thanks Roy Hay for his comments on an earlier draft, Patrick Miller, two anonymous reviewers, and Rosemary Clerehan (Monash University).

## Note on title

One reviewer brutally insists that the title of this paper be explained for readers from non-AFL realms. A 'torp' is shorthand for a 'torpedo', a kick in Australian Rules football that is made to spin in the air and thereby gain additional distance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alan Attwood, 'A fight for the cold soul of football', *The Age News Extra*, 2 September 2000, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Hay, Marnie Haig-Muir and Peter Mewett, "'A stadium as fine as any on earth" or "Arctic Park"? – The tortured past and uncertain future of a cultural icon', *Vision Splendid: Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 66, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000, pp. 158–168; Roy Hay, Marnie Haig-Muir, Peter Mewett, Colleen Lazenby and Nigel Lewis, 'Waverley Park: Whose social history?', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 18, no. 1, Australian Society for Sports History, Bedford Park, November 2001, pp. 1–17.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Pascoe, Presentation on the cultural significance of Waverley Park, Registrations Committee of the Heritage Council, Nauru House, Melbourne, 23 June 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Heritage Victoria, HER/2000/00044, dated 30 August 2000 from Andrew Lemon. Copy in possession of Roy Hay.

<sup>7</sup> Hay et al., 'A stadium', *op. cit.*, p. 159; Hay et al, 'Whose social history?', *op. cit.*, p. 5; Roy Hay, 'AFL pays price', Letter to the editor, *The Age*, 21 March 2009, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Miller, personal communication, 23 June 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Heritage Council Victoria*, Annual Report, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> The current registration is online at <<http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/places/heritage/6059>>, accessed 23 July 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *The Age Domain*, 14 June 2008, p. 5.

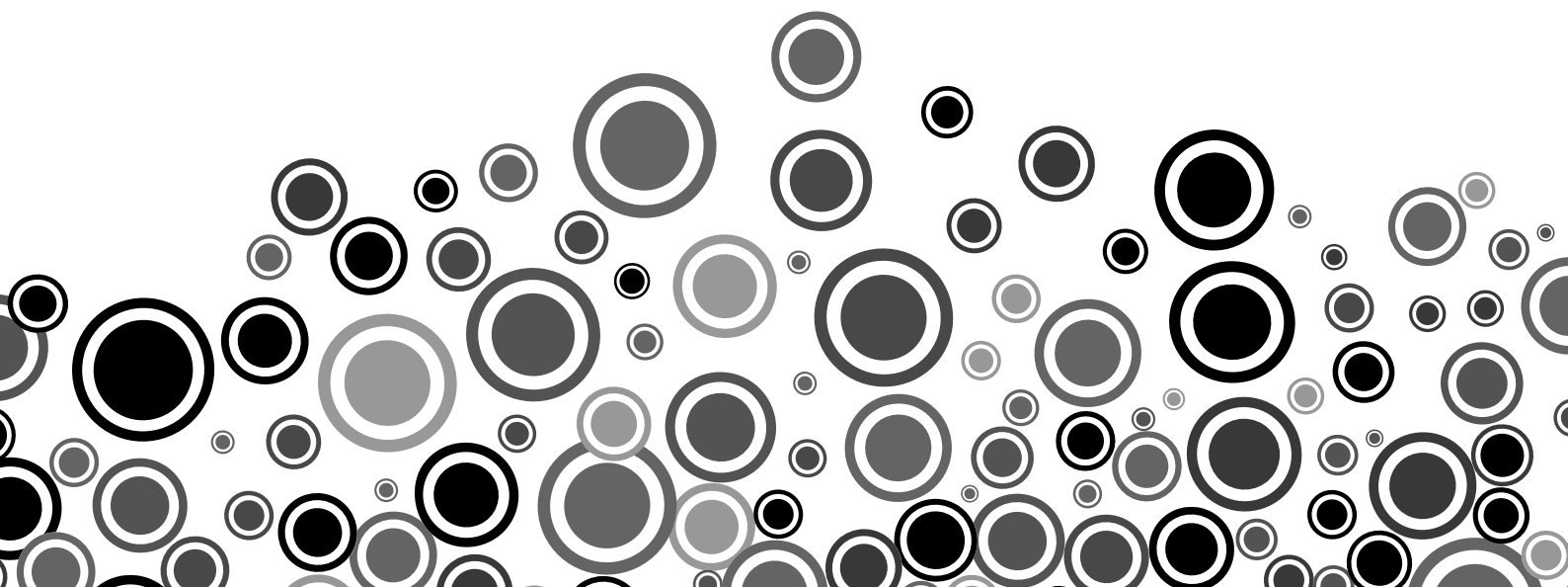
<sup>15</sup> Only one of these 15 comments attempted to defend the decision to close Waverley Park. <[http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/sport/index.php/heraldsun/comments/the\\_great\\_mistake\\_of\\_closing\\_waverley/#commentsmore](http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/sport/index.php/heraldsun/comments/the_great_mistake_of_closing_waverley/#commentsmore)>, accessed 3 June 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Boulton, 'Grounds for change or taking a stand for tradition?', *The Age*, 2 July 2005, p. 9.

Part two

# Discoveries

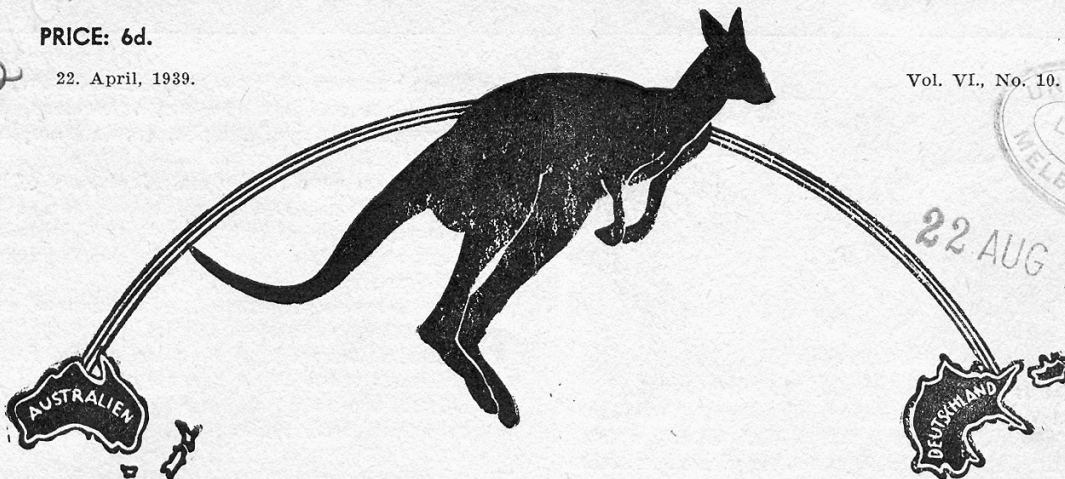
Discovering and telling a story



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# DIE BRÜCKE

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## ZUM 50. GEBURTSTAG ADOLF HITLERS



Bauernkinder vom Lande in der Reichskanzlei gratulieren dem Führer und überreichen ihm einen Feldblumenstrauß.

*Die Brücke* (The Bridge), the local Nazi propaganda newspaper, was edited by Arnold von Skerst. This edition on 22 April 1939 celebrated Hitler's 50th birthday. By bringing events in Nazi Germany into the local context, *Die Brücke* sought to re-focus German-Australians on the German homeland. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE LIBRARY

# ARNOLD VON SKERST

## Australia's own red-hot Nazi?

Emily Turner-Graham

'When you meet your friends who were in Tatura do you give the Nazi salute and "Heil Hitler!" like you used to in the German club?', the *Sunday Sun* asked Arnold von Skerst in 1948. Few Australians realise that Hitler's Germany was not as remote to our shores as we might like to think. In fact, 1930s Australia played host to a local Nazi party that had branches in most Australian capital cities.

At the centre of the Nazi story in Australia is an extraordinary man, Arnold Oscar Hermann Gregory von Skerst. His life was played out across three continents and in the midst of the most important political movements of the twentieth century. From tsarist diplomat to editor of Australia's Nazi newspaper *Die Brücke*, Australia's 'red-hot Nazi', was to meet a tragic end in 1948 following his release from wartime internment. This paper examines a largely unheard-of political presence in Australia, and the astonishing tale of one man at its centre.

On the morning of Christmas Eve 1948, the caretaker of the apartment block at 233 Avoca Street in Randwick smelt gas coming out of one of the flats. He called the local police. They arrived, and shortly before 8 am found Arnold von Skerst lying on a mattress in his kitchen with his head in the gas stove. Neighbours had heard him pacing the floor until midnight the night before. He had left a note warning whoever found him of '[g]as, careful.'<sup>1</sup> It was a peculiar and poignant end for a man described by Charles Price, who worked on von Skerst's case as a security officer, as having 'an air of cultivated civilised knowledge and experience; strange to me with my more narrow Australian background.'<sup>2</sup> Von Skerst was an exotic foreigner in interwar Australia's Anglo-Celtic midst, and 1940s Australian society had no idea what to make of him.

The tabloid newspapers reported von Skerst's death as they had done his life – with salacious relish. 'Sydney Nazi found dead' proclaimed the *Sunday Sun*,<sup>3</sup> 'Ex-Nazi found dead with head in gas oven' reported the *Sunday Telegraph* bluntly,<sup>4</sup> while the tawdry *Truth* trumpeted 'Ex-Nazi found head in stove: Von Skerst's death in flat'.<sup>5</sup> The *Truth* reported that von Skerst's European background and fluctuating political allegiances made him a 'strange mixture'<sup>6</sup> while the *Sun* painted him as a blackguard who had threatened his 'pretty young wife', Hazel von Skerst, the night before his suicide. She had then fled the Avoca Street address, the *Sun* continued, apparently fearing violence.<sup>7</sup> Neighbours suggested that Hazel, von Skerst's fourth wife, had in fact gone to a party. The caretaker of the Avoca Street flats refused to give his name to the *Truth*. 'If I talked,' he said, 'my life wouldn't be worth 3d [three pence]. There have been some strange characters around here visiting von Skerst's flat. I received certain instructions

from the police when I told them various things. So I am not saying anything.'<sup>8</sup>

Arnold Oskar Hermann Gregory von Skerst was the embodiment of Europe's complex and difficult twentieth century as it had been played out so far. His life is a striking tale which swept across three continents in the midst of the most important political movements of the period. Working in the tsarist diplomatic corps, he escaped the violence of the Russian Revolution, negotiated oil deals in 1920s Shanghai and fled China just as the Japanese army marched in. He reinvented himself as the editor of *Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*), a Nazi propaganda newspaper printed in Sydney, becoming known as Australia's 'red-hot Nazi' and 'local Doctor Goebbels',<sup>9</sup> only to meet his tragic end in 1948 following release from internment. Australia's Nazis were not working in isolation. They were part of a worldwide Nazi policy to spread the German fascist doctrine to expatriate German communities everywhere, and von Skerst was an important link in the chain. This story is a beginning to the largely unheard tale of the political presence of Nazism in Australia.

Von Skerst was born in 1888 in Riga. His ancestors had moved to Latvia from Germany at the beginning of the seventeenth century and, by the time of von Skerst's birth, the family had achieved reasonable social standing. His father was the head of customs administration at Riga; at the culmination of his career the elder von Skerst had responsibility for the customs administration of the entire western borders of the Russian Empire.<sup>10</sup>

The young Arnold was well-educated, his father's professional position ensuring the family a degree of wealth. Von Skerst claimed that his social standing was not based solely on his father's profession, however,

but also upon the fact that the family were long of 'gentle birth'.<sup>11</sup> As such Arnold was taught by English governesses, attended a *Gymnasium* in Germany, and later went to the Imperial Alexander Lyceum of St Petersburg, a special school restricted to the children of the nobility.

It was this last educational stop at the Lyceum which set him on his extraordinary adult path, providing him with entry into Russia's imperial public service. In 1912 he joined the Foreign Department of the Ministry of Finance, where he began work as a diplomatic courier. He travelled widely throughout Europe in this capacity, and his role in arranging for the shipping of Russian gold to the safety of the Bank of England via British warships during World War I earned him the Russian order of St Michael.

In 1917 he was appointed to the position of assistant financial attaché in Washington by the Kerensky government. During the same year he married Anne Kaiser, a woman of Persian-Russian background.<sup>12</sup> Von Skerst arrived in the United States in September 1917, shortly before the Bolshevik October Revolution sent his professional world into chaos. He held the position in Washington until May 1918, when he was dismissed with four months' salary and a passage back to Russia. After travelling for some months through the Pacific and Manchuria, he ended up in Kiev where he took a position with the treasury of the White government, which had its headquarters in the Ukrainian capital. With the collapse of that short-lived government von Skerst was on the move yet again, this time to Vladivostok where he remained with what was left of the White forces. The Red Army invaded the city yet suprisingly, given his position, von Skerst was not shot. Rather, he was permitted to leave for Shanghai. He held a number of financial posts in the Chinese city, and was dismissed from several for misappropriating funds. Eventually he settled with the East China Railway Company.

He left Shanghai in 1930 following the death of his second wife Olga Gorlov – a Siberian-Russian whom he had married in 1928 following his divorce from his first wife in 1926 – and went to Germany on a Soviet passport.<sup>13</sup> He also adopted Olga's five-year-old son, Igor Borisoff. Upon Olga's death, he took Igor home to Germany to be raised by his own family.<sup>14</sup> Von Skerst lived in Germany for a year and obtained a German passport with which he travelled to Australia to negotiate the sale of oil to Australian companies and the construction of storage tanks at Sydney and Melbourne on behalf of Kahan Brothers, former owners of a large oil company in the Russian Caucasus and now agents for the sale of Soviet and other oil. While

he was in Melbourne in 1931 several German banks collapsed; the finance for oil exports thus disappeared and von Skerst was left stranded in Australia with only £140.

Once again, however, he managed to resurrect himself and find the means to return to Shanghai. Dogged by bad luck, his time in China was cut short by the invasion of the Japanese army. In February 1932 he left for Sydney, penniless. Later, at the 1941 Australian tribunal hearing protesting his internment during World War II, he said of this period:

I could remain ... and work there as a white man under Chinese, later probably under Japanese domination. Such a prospect was more than distasteful; it was impossible.<sup>15</sup>

To survive after arriving in Australia he taught some of the eight languages in which he was fluent and on 1 January 1934 he was appointed editor of local Nazi publication *Die Brücke*. He edited *Die Brücke* throughout its lifespan and, in this capacity, contributed articles to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and for broadcast on the ABC. Von Skerst attended meetings of the New South Wales branch of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers Party, NSDAP or Nazi Party) from its first gathering on 10 April 1934 at the Waratah Café in Margaret Street, when he was placed in charge of canvassing support.

By making himself such a prominent pro-Nazi advocate, he easily brought himself to the attention of Australian Security Services during the course of the 1930s. Von Skerst claimed that he only edited *Die Brücke* to make money, however. 'I only did what I was told,' he stated in the *Herald* in 1946. 'I took the job as editor because I was hungry ... I ... was just part of the Nazi machinery.'<sup>16</sup> He was not, he claimed, ideologically committed to its Nazi message. In this, von

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**'to maintain my position and be able to provide for my family in Australia and my relatives in Europe, I had to be a Nazi, act as a Nazi and write as a Nazi'**

---

Skerst was a complex figure. While his protestations during and after the war are suggestive of a classic 'Nuremberg defence', which seemed to reflect the desperate actions of a man who had realised too late the profoundly erroneous nature of his very publicly professed political allegiances, and the disastrous circumstances in which such allegiances had placed him, there are some anomalies in his story that must also be acknowledged.

Certainly there is no question that von Skerst was an active member of the Nazi community in Australia. The apparently contradictory claims in his wartime tribunal statement (and during his internment) do seem to undercut his claims of innocence; he actively

sought a German passport in 1931 (although already in possession of a Russian one), reclaiming his distant German heritage and lauding the Germans on the basis that they were 'anti-Bolshevik'.<sup>17</sup> It must be said, however, that it was far easier to gain entry into Australia with a German passport during this period than with a Soviet one.<sup>18</sup> Further, many people from a variety of backgrounds were attracted to Nazism on the basis of its anti-Communist stance.<sup>19</sup> This fact alone did not necessarily make any of them ardent Nazis. Later in the tribunal transcript, von Skerst claimed that 'Germany for me has always been a country foreign and little liked.'<sup>20</sup> On top of his *Herald* assertion that he only took the *Die Brücke* position because he was hungry, he claimed that becoming a Nazi in Australia actually enhanced his potential for employment in the eyes of the German-Australian community.

[I]n the German community in this country, I would not only improve my prospects, but perhaps have a good chance of employment if I became a Nazi.<sup>21</sup>

This is an extraordinary statement, for it not only directly equates German-Australian identity with Nazism; it also suggests that the foothold Nazism had already achieved amongst German-Australians meant adherence to National Socialism was a key criterion in a prospective employee. Nor was it an assertion made only by von Skerst. R. Sadilek, an Australian expelled from the Nazi Party for allegedly being of Jewish descent, similarly stated that 'my sole reason for joining the said Nazi Party was to improve my business relationships ...'<sup>22</sup>

There is, perhaps – as could be argued with much of von Skerst's testimony – a degree of malice at work in the statements of the editor of *Die Brücke* regarding the extent of Nazi allegiance within the German-Australian community: he had been roundly rejected by the German-Australian community, and may have wanted to besmirch its character in order to return the affront.

Further, von Skerst persists, he *had to* become a Nazi in order to survive:

Consequently, to maintain my position and be able to provide for my family in Australia and my relatives in Europe, I had to be a Nazi, act as a Nazi and write as a Nazi.<sup>23</sup>

Yet von Skerst assumed this supposed mask with an impressive appearance of truth. Under his editorial guidance, for example, articles supporting the Nazi government's introduction of laws allowing compulsory sterilisation in 1933 made their way into *Die Brücke*.<sup>24</sup> Key Nazi race ideologues like Dr Walter Groß were featured<sup>25</sup> and the women's pages of the newspaper regularly highlighted the vital role of women as 'mothers of the German race'.<sup>26</sup>

As well as acting as *Die Brücke's* editor, he became the Australian correspondent for a German journal published from Hamburg in 1936. He became secretary to the German-Australian Chamber of Commerce in 1937 and he was secretary of the Nazi Party in Australia. In that same year, he was made *Pressleiter* (press leader) by the local NSDAP (having joined the Party in 1935), which involved gathering articles from Australian newspapers on Germany, Germans, German-Australians and – most damningly – on Australian defence, and sending them back to Germany. He gave a series

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### Was Australia a budding hot-bed of Nazi sedition, in which the only way for a German to get ahead was to pledge allegiance to the Nazi cause?

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of papers at local NSDAP meetings on matters of which he had considerable experience, such as Russia and the Far East, and spoke at the International Art Exhibition at Sydney on the suitably Nazi topic that there was no such thing as international art, only national arts, such as a peculiarly German art. This theme of Nazi ideology was to emerge repeatedly throughout *Die Brücke's* pages, suggesting not only von Skerst's own interest in it but also casting some doubt his claims that he had no editorial authority over the newspaper.

He joined the Nazi organisation *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF, German Workers Front) in 1935 and even kept up a connection with Anglo-German sympathisers by subscribing to the *Anglo-German Review*. So how accurate was von Skerst's assessment of the German-Australian community between the wars? Was Australia a budding hot-bed of Nazi sedition, in which the only way for a German to get ahead was to pledge allegiance to the Nazi cause?

On 21 November 1933, Captain A.G. Cameron, a member of parliament in Adelaide, received 'secret' correspondence from a Lieutenant-Colonel stationed at Keswick Barracks addressing exactly this question, asking whether a Nazi organisation had been formed in Australia, following the success of Nazism in Germany in January that same year.

The appended extract from the Australian Station Intelligence Report issued by the Naval Intelligence Division on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1933, is forwarded —

#### FORMATION OF BRANCH OF NAZIS IN AUSTRALIA

A branch of the Nazis is being formed in Australia. It is understood that the moving spirit in the organisation is a man named Becker, of South Australia. as far as can be ascertained,



A meeting of the DAF, *Die Brücke*, 23 November 1936

## NAZI INTERNEE OUT OF QUIZ

Arnold von Skerst, former Nazi internee and foreign language teacher of Kirribilli, has been removed from the position of reservist to the N.S.W. team to compete in the Sixth Security Loan quiz to-night.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Chifley) announced this yesterday after a conference with the Commonwealth Loan Organiser (Mr. Banfield).

Mr. Chifley said should a reservist be needed for the team, the services of Arnold von Skerst would not be used.

*Canberra Times*, 9 September 1948

## GAOL SENTENCE FOR NAZI'S WIDOW

**'SYDNEY, Friday.**

Joan Salmon, widow of the former Nazi propagandist, Arnold Oscar Herman Gregory von Skerst, 60, was to-day sentenced to six weeks' gaol and fined £5 by Mr. Denton, S.M., at Central Court.

Salmon, of Devonshire Street, Surry Hills, pleaded guilty to three charges under the Vagrancy Act and one charge of consorting with criminals.

Salmon later lodged notice of appeal against the severity of the sentence.

*Canberra Times*, 23 July 1949



*Sunday Sun*, 29 August 1948

The rise and fall of Australia's 'Red-Hot Nazi': newspaper clippings show the infamy of Arnold von Skerst and his tragic fall from grace in 1948.

## EX-NAZI FOUND HEAD IN STOVE Von Skerst's Death In Flat

*Truth*, 26 December 1948

the organisation will take the form of purely a propaganda society for furthering German interests in Australia ... Please advise if you have any further information regarding the organisation referred to.<sup>27</sup>

Cameron felt able to confidently reject the Lieutenant-Colonel's information. The following day he replied that '[n]o Nazi Party has been formed here.'<sup>28</sup> As evidence, he cited a copy of the Nazi Party's 25 point plan, which, to the casual observer's eye, seemed to focus Nazism's efforts firmly upon Germany alone.<sup>29</sup> Further, he suggested, any Nazi material to be found in Australia was only distributed safely amongst the dependable hands of the German-Australian community's male elders and then solely because they were 'naturally interested in the trend of affairs in Germany'.<sup>30</sup> Johannes Becker, cited by Cameron as the ringleader of Nazism's apparent foray into Australia, was disregarded as similarly non-threatening, since he was 'now in Germany...[though]... formerly of Tanunda.' In short, '[a]ny attempt to form a Nazi Party here would fail'.<sup>31</sup>

But Cameron was wrong. In fact, the first Nazi *Stützpunkt* (stronghold or small political cell) was formed in Adelaide in 1932 by Johannes Becker, a German doctor who had taken a number of trips back to Germany, but who was living permanently in Tanunda, South Australia. By 1934 other *Stützpunkt* had followed in Tanunda (also on Becker's initiative), Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. When war came in September 1939, procedures to establish a branch in Perth were also underway.

Yet it could not be said that German-Australians joined the local Nazi Party branches in droves. Despite some academic debate over exact figures, it can be confirmed that membership lists never numbered more than two hundred.<sup>32</sup> In an expatriate population of 50,000–100,000, this leaves the figures of the local Nazi groups looking rather insubstantial. But it is not simply by direct party membership numbers that the spread of Nazi ideas in Australia should be assessed. The local Nazi Party, under the instruction of their parent organisation in Germany, created and made good use of 'front' organisations that were off-shoots of the Party itself and also of sympathetic non-Party groups, both of which often possessed a much larger membership than the Party itself and provided an excellent opportunity through which to disseminate information. Members of these groups were often sympathetic, though either unwilling to commit formally to the Party or unable to meet the strict membership criteria.

Cameron comforted himself with the apparent assurances of the NSDAP's 25 point plan, which stated 'only members of the nation may be citizens

of the State'; however what he didn't realise was that the Nazis held an altered understanding of what constituted a 'nation': 'only those of German blood ... may be members of the nation.'<sup>33</sup> The eternal, 'sacred' bond of German blood – the *Blutgemeinschaft* (blood community) – would always amount to more than national borders merely imposed by human beings. As such 'a German day in Buenos Aires or Chicago concerns us just as deeply as the struggle of our brethren near our frontiers' proclaimed Ernst Bohle, head of the *Auslandsorganisation*, the Nazi organisation for Germans overseas.<sup>34</sup> '[T]he fundamental principle of blood brotherhood between the people of the German homeland and their national groups abroad is sacred to us', the Foreign Minister, Constantin von Neurath, said.<sup>35</sup> In 1934 Rudolf Hess confirmed that Germany was the epicentre – but not the sole location – of all Germans when he said 'Germany is home for all the Germans in the world.'<sup>36</sup> Even Hitler himself suggested that Germans overseas in fact made better Nazis because they were unaffected by local German squabbles and 'petty differences'.<sup>37</sup>

So in Australia, instead of a vast contingent of official Party members, the 1930s saw the local development of Party-associated organisations like *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labour Front), *Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Frauen im Ausland* (Work Group of German Women Abroad), *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls). Outside any sort of specific Party confines, though largely no less sympathetic to the Nazi cause, were *Deutscher Unterrichtsverein* (German study circles) – three of which received special attention from the Australian security services. For example, the *Deutscher Unterrichtsverein*, located at Albury and formed by a Lutheran pastor in 1936, was amply supplied with Nazi printed and film propaganda by German Consul-General to Australia, Dr Rudolf Asmis. Asmis also arranged for appropriate speakers to address such groups and was a driving force in the spreading of the Nazi message in Australia.<sup>38</sup> Asmis was also the guiding force in the development of *Die Brücke*.

The outbreak of World War II saw the end of *Die Brücke's* print run and the internment of von Skerst (amongst others). Yet *Die Brücke's* message had had a modicum of success and a National Socialist German identity prevailed, at least for some German-Australians who were held in Australia's internment camps. And while there is obviously no comparison between the savage wartime world of the Nazis' push into eastern Europe and the relative calm of interwar and wartime Australia, many aspects of the ideological depiction of National Socialism in Australia were in fact a precursor – admittedly reshaped

It was a whimpering end to a life, which, though misguided in its allegiance, was not without colour.



to suit its location – of that which was employed to bring Nazism to isolated ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe. The importance of telling the story of Nazism's push into Australia and other similarly distant realms of what would one day supposedly become a Nazi empire is clear. A worldwide racialised German culture was the cornerstone on which this empire would be built.

Following his release from the internment camp at Tatura in 1946 and the unfavourable media coverage he had received while imprisoned, Arnold von Skerst was shunned by many who had known him during his chequered inter-war years. He could not find work – except in a position organised by the Quakers as a servant – and his selection to appear on a radio quiz show to raise government loans created public outcry and nearly ended in his deportation. His attempt to become a naturalised Australian was predictably unsuccessful. Von Skerst was interviewed by the tabloid *Sunday Sun* in 1948, at the height of the quiz show scandal, under the deliberately provocative heading 'He used to be a Nazi'. The inference of his apparently duplicitous nature is writ large:

**Question:** What flag do you like best now?

**Skerst:** The Australian flag, because all Australians are gentlemen.

**Q:** When you meet your friends who were in Tatura, do you give the Nazi salute and 'Heil Hitler!' like you used to in the German club?

**Skerst:** It was the accepted thing to do then. It was merely a gesture. I never meet those people anymore. They don't want me. I was only a catspaw.

**Q:** Are you still seeking to become a naturalised Australian?

**Skerst:** Of course.<sup>39</sup>

The tone of interviews like this one no doubt made

clear to von Skerst the hopelessness of a possible future in Australia. Coupled with the departure of his fourth wife, it all became too much to bear and on Christmas Eve 1948 von Skerst put his head in a gas oven and committed suicide. It was a whimpering end to a life, which, though misguided in its allegiance, was not without colour.

The tale of Arnold von Skerst highlights the broader question of how to approach the often hidden history of political extremism in Australia. Obviously, no National Socialist government was installed and no war crimes even remotely akin to those of the Nazis were committed on Australian shores. Yet, as the Sydney Consul Dr Walter Hellenthal observed and *Die Brücke* reported in 1934, 'Germany does not forget the 30 million Germans who live beyond the Reich borders who are all true and loyal to their host country but in whose breasts are German hearts.'<sup>40</sup> Hellenthal made it clear that 'the idea of National Socialism goes across all borders.'<sup>41</sup>

While 1939 may have seen *Die Brücke's* attempt to bridge the old German homeland and the Antipodean new world fail in terms of attracting mass allegiance to the Party and its front organisations, and while there is obviously no comparison between the savage wartime world of the Nazi East and the relative calm of interwar and wartime Australia, it can be seen that *Die Brücke*, and, by definition, Arnold von Skerst, in constructing a localised version of National Socialism in Australia, provided a blueprint – admittedly reshaped to suit its location – of those tactics which were employed to bring nazified Germanness to isolated ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe.<sup>42</sup> In laying down one stone in the ideological foundation of what was to one day become a Nazi empire – but failing in this mission – the complex, problematic but ultimately highly significant historical role of Arnold von Skerst is clear.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> NAA: ST1233/1, N38423, 'Ex-Nazi found head in stove: Von Skerst's death in flat', *Truth*, 26 December 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Moore, "'...when the caretaker's busy taking care?'" Cross-currents in Australian political surveillance and internment, 1935–1941', in Kay Saunders and Roger Daniels (eds), *Alien Justice: wartime internment in Australia and North America*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000, pp. 47–65.

<sup>3</sup> NAA: ST1233/1, N38423, 'Sydney Nazi found dead', *Sunday Sun*, 26 December 1948.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 'Ex-Nazi found dead with head in gas oven', *Sunday Telegraph*, 26 December 1948.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 'Ex-Nazi found head in stove: Von Skerst's death in flat', *Truth*, 26 December 1948.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 'Nazi von Skerst threatened wife before suicide', *Sun*, 4 February 1949.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 'Ex-Nazi found head in stove: Von Skerst's death in flat', *Truth*, 26 December 1948.

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Tampke and Colin Doxford, *Australia, Willkommen: a history of the Germans in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW, 1990, p. 225. These quotes were taken from military intelligence reports of the time.

<sup>10</sup> NAA: B741/5, V/11032, 'Commonwealth of Australia National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations Number 143: In the matter of an objection by Arnold von Skerst'. See also Emily Turner-Graham, 'Never forget you are a German: *Die Brücke*, *Deutschtum* and National Socialism in interwar Australia', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006. See also John Perkins, 'Skerst, Arnold Oscar Hermann Gregory von (1888–1948)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, online edition, <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110637b.htm>>.

- <sup>11</sup> NAA: B741/5, V/11032, 'Commonwealth of Australia National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations Number 143: In the matter of an objection by Arnold von Skerst'.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, Olga Gorlov also used Gorloff as a surname.
- <sup>14</sup> Igor Borisoff may also have been known as Ivan Borisoff. Barbara Winter, 'Arnold von Skerst: Servant of Two Masters', in Emily Turner-Graham and Christine Winter (eds), *National Socialism in Oceania: a critical evaluation of its effect and its aftermath*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2009.
- <sup>15</sup> NAA: V.I.128, Australian Military Files, 13 January 1939.
- <sup>16</sup> NAA: B741/5, V/10032, 'Former Nazi official seeks naturalisation', *Herald*, 27 May 1946.
- <sup>17</sup> NAA: B741/5, V/11032, 'Commonwealth of Australia National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations Number 143: In the matter of an objection by Arnold von Skerst'.
- <sup>18</sup> My thanks for John Perkins to pointing this out to me in email correspondence dated 23 August 2003.
- <sup>19</sup> See, for examples, Emily Turner-Graham, 'True comrades in struggle...? Women of the far right: a study of leaders in fascism and sympathetic movements in inter-war Britain', MA thesis, Monash University, 1997.
- <sup>20</sup> NAA: B741/5, V/11032, 'Commonwealth of Australia National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations Number 143: In the matter of an objection by Arnold von Skerst'.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>22</sup> NAA: D1918/S35, Nazi activities in South Australia 1939–1945, R. Sadilek, statement, 17 March 1941, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Germany's Sterilisation Law', *Die Brücke*, 30 June 1934, pp. 3–6.
- <sup>25</sup> See, for example, Dr Walter Groß, 'The World and the Race-Conception in Germany', *Die Brücke*, 1 June 1935, p. 27; Dr Walter Groß, *Deutschland und Andere Rassen* (Germany and other races), *Die Brücke*, 21 March 1936, p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup> See, for example 'Rassenpflege ist Volkspflege' (Taking racial care means caring for the *Volk*), *Die Brücke*, 6 March 1937, p. 23. The message was regularly reinforced in poetry too, such as Herybert Menzel, 'Die deutsche Mutter' (The German mother), *Die Brücke*, 18 May 1939, p. 23.
- <sup>27</sup> Anonymous, file D1915/SA20419 NSDAP – Army File AS14, Australian Archives, Adelaide. All punctuation appears as in the original document.
- <sup>28</sup> NAA: D1915/SA20419 NSDAP – Army File AS14, Letter from Cameron dated 22 November 1933.
- <sup>29</sup> This point is examined in detail in Emily Turner-Graham, 'Never Forget that you are a German': *Die Brücke, Deutschtum and National Socialism in interwar Australia*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2010 (forthcoming).
- <sup>30</sup> NAA: D1915/SA20419 NSDAP – Army File AS14, Letter from Cameron dated 22 November 1933.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> This is a median figure reached from the calculations of Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik 1933–1938*, A. Metzner, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1968, p. 385, and similar figures cited by Ian A. Harmstorf, *Insights into South Australian History – South Australia's German History and Heritage*, vol. 2, Historical Society of South Australia, Adelaide, 1994, p. 73. These figures are examined in greater detail in the introduction of Turner-Graham, 2010 (forthcoming).
- <sup>33</sup> The 25 points of the NSDAP program are widely available and can be seen in full, for example, at <[http://www.schoolhistory.org.uk/ASLevel\\_History/25pointnsdapprogramme.htm](http://www.schoolhistory.org.uk/ASLevel_History/25pointnsdapprogramme.htm)>.
- <sup>34</sup> Ernst Bohle quoted in Louis L. Snyder, *The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, Marlowe & Company, New York, 1976, p. 14.
- <sup>35</sup> Constantin von Neurath to Rudolf Hess, 17 April 1935, *Auswärtiges Amt, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945, series C (1933–1937): The Third Reich: First Phase*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1959–1966, series C, vol. IV, 1962, p. 64.
- <sup>36</sup> Hess speaking at the 1934 Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg as filmed by Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the will), Connoisseur Video Collection, USA, 2000.
- <sup>37</sup> Hitler quoted in 'Our third year begins', *Die Brücke*, 22 February 1936, p. 3.
- <sup>38</sup> Dr Rudolf Asmis is a complex figure whose allegiance to Nazism was not a straightforward one. His career is examined in John Perkins, 'Dr Asmis and the "Rescue of Deutschtum" in Australia in the 1930s', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1988, pp. 296–312 and also Emily Turner-Graham, "'The country is young [to] the European and [is] full of possibilities for the white immigrant...": Dr Rudolf Asmis, Australia and the location of *Deutschtum*', unpublished paper given at Australian Historical Association Conference, University of Melbourne, 2008.
- <sup>39</sup> NAA: ST1233/1, N38423, 'He used to be a Nazi: ex-Nazi's role in loan quiz', 29 August 1948.
- <sup>40</sup> Anonymous, Sydney report, 'Aus Deutschen Kreisen' column, 27 October 1934, pp. 17–18.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> This idea is developed in my PhD thesis: Emily Turner-Graham, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006. This thesis will be published as Emily Turner-Graham, 'Never Forget that you are a German': *Die Brücke, Deutschtum and National Socialism in interwar Australia*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2010 (forthcoming).
- <sup>43</sup> See also Emily Turner-Graham, "'The forest is the original home of the German soul": *Die Brücke* and the complexities of finding a racial landscape', in Emily Turner-Graham and Christine Winter (eds), *National Socialism in Oceania: A critical evaluation of its effect and its aftermath*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, pp. 1–17.

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James McLean

To the Honorable the Speaker, and Members  
of the Legislative Assembly of the  
Colony of Victoria, in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the undersigned Women  
of Victoria respectfully sheweth: —

That your Petitioners believe: —

That Government, of the People by the People,  
and for the People should mean all  
the People, and not one-half. —

That Taxation and Representation should go  
together without regard to the sex of  
the Taxed. —

That all Adult Persons should have a voice  
in Making the Laws which they are  
required to obey. —

That, in short, Women should Vote on Equal Terms  
with Men. —

Your Petitioners, therefore, humbly pray your  
Honorable House to pass a Measure  
for conferring the Parliamentary Franchise  
upon Women, regarding this as a right  
which they most earnestly desire. —

And your Petitioners will ever Pray.

Name — Address —

J <sup>rs</sup> William McLean	East Melbourne
J <sup>rs</sup> James Innes	Armadale
Marie F. Hair	South Yarra
Margaret Reymouth	South Yarra

The front page of the Monster Petition, requesting that 'Government of the People by the People, and for the People should mean all the People, and not one half'. Margaret McLean's signature appears first.

PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, UNIT 851, FEMALE SUFFRAGE PETITION, 1891. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

# MARGARET MCLEAN AND THE MONSTER PETITION

‘We want laws which will make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong’

Liz Rushen

Victoria celebrated the centenary of suffrage for women in November 2008. In 1891, the presentation to Parliament of the so-called ‘Monster Petition’ – signed by 30,000 women – was a defining moment in the struggle for female franchise in Victoria. An evocative sculpture has been erected in Burston Reserve East Melbourne to commemorate this event.

Many women’s organisations combined to collect the signatures for the petition. It was the largest ever presented to Parliament and amazed those who had condescendingly declared that women did not want the vote. Focusing on Margaret McLean, the first signatory on the petition, this paper explores the motivations of the women involved in the struggle for the female franchise in Victoria and considers why the Monster Petition has become such an icon.

## The Monster Petition

In December 2008, a striking sculpture was unveiled in Burston Reserve, East Melbourne, to celebrate the centenary of suffrage for Victorian women. Titled *Great Petition*, it was designed by artists Susan Hewitt and Penelope Lee to celebrate the efforts of Victorian women in claiming the right to vote. A contemporary reading of the 1891 Monster Petition, it symbolises the struggle for the female franchise and pays tribute to the importance of the action in which thousands of women signed the petition. Appropriately situated between the Victorian Parliament House and the Victorian branch of the National Trust, it is a stunning work.

Fabricated in rolled steel and painted in parchment white, the form of this artwork echoes the folds of the original Monster Petition which was nearly 260 metres long. Initially called the ‘Woman’s Suffrage Petition’ or the ‘Women’s Petition for the Franchise’, it became known as the Monster Petition because of its great length. It was the largest petition to have been presented to the Victorian parliament at that time and was made of paper pasted to a backing of cotton or linen. Several attendants were required to carry it into parliament when it was tabled in September 1891. Now housed at the Public Record Office Victoria, it has been rolled onto a cardboard spindle and rests on a stand.<sup>1</sup>

## Collecting the signatures

The end of the nineteenth century was significant in terms of the role of women in society. There was escalating interest in the twin issues of social reform and the female franchise, and several suffrage societies were formed to advance these causes, including the Victorian Women’s Suffrage Society and the United Council for Woman Suffrage. Together with organisations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Women’s Temperance Society, they provided a focus and recruiting ground for supporters of women’s advancement.<sup>2</sup>



*Great Petition* by Susan Hewitt and Penelope Lee, in Burston Reserve, Melbourne.

PHOTOGRAPH: DIANE DILORIO. SOURCE: ARTS VICTORIA

New expressions such as 'the woman question' and 'women's rights' drew attention to the worldwide movement to gain the female franchise. Some Victorian women had voted in a municipal election in 1864 through an anomaly in the wording of the *Electoral Act 1863*. The phrase 'all persons' was used to refer to people on the municipal voting rolls, based on property ownership. When some women bravely exercised their right, the Electoral Act was quickly amended on the grounds that it was not the original intention of the Act that women should vote. Participation in politics in any form was viewed as a solely male domain and it was in this context that the women's suffrage movement first evolved in Victoria.

Victorian women joined others around the world in clamouring for voting rights. The Australian campaign was intense, but did not reach the heights of the British campaign where sabotage was rampant across Britain in the name of 'Votes for Women'. Houses and churches were burned and bombed, paintings slashed, letterboxes damaged and sporting events disrupted. Hundreds of women were imprisoned; many underwent hunger strikes and forced feeding, and some women died for the cause.

Australian women preferred to work within the legislative framework, and one of their major tactics was to present petitions to the various parliaments in order to demonstrate the widespread support for the female franchise. Two particularly large petitions saw 11,600 signatures gathered in South Australia and 11,366 signatures in Queensland; but neither of these petitions was as large as the Monster Petition of Victoria.<sup>3</sup>

The Victorian petition was inspired by a speech made at the Victorian Alliance conference of 1891 by the president of the WCTU, Margaret McLean. She gave a stirring opening paper, which proposed 'that women might vote on equal terms with men'. As one member stated, 'the paper read by Mrs. McLean ... prepared the way for work for Womanhood Suffrage'.<sup>4</sup> The paper was so well received that it was printed and distributed throughout the WCTU branch network. Inspired by Margaret's speech, many came to believe that a massive petition would sway the parliament in granting voting rights to women.

The impact of the paper is revealed in the *Alliance Record* of 22 August 1891 which lists the suffrage activities of the various WCTU branches. The Castlemaine branch reported:

A special meeting was held ... to discuss Womanhood suffrage. Mrs. McLean's paper was read, and after some discussion it was unanimously

decided to take up that work. We intend not only to canvass the town, but the surrounding district as well.<sup>5</sup>

Individual biographies have been written on some of the leaders of the suffrage movement, yet others who were instrumental to the Victorian campaign are unknown. While it is impossible to give voice to all the women who made a contribution to the suffrage cause, this paper focuses on Margaret McLean, the first signatory on the Monster Petition. Although little is known about her, McLean, through her inspirational speech, was central to the petition's existence. She was also instrumental in the vast organisational process involved in gathering the signatures by the network of WCTU branches across the state.

By 1891 the WCTU had branches throughout Victoria, and the suffrage societies combined with the WCTU to utilise their strategic network in gathering signatures. Embarking on an exhaustive doorknocking campaign across Victoria, the combined efforts of these voluntary organisations collected 30,000 signatures in just six weeks, an extraordinary feat in an era of limited transport and communications.

As Vida Goldstein, Australia's first female parliamentary candidate, remarked:

I recall my first participation in public affairs, when I helped my mother collect signatures for the great 'Woman Suffrage Petition' ... The signatures were collected mainly through the WCTU, and the Victorian Temperance Alliance, assisted by the Suffrage Societies, three in number, which, at that time, were centralised in Melbourne. Their members were hard workers and enthusiastic, but they had no country organisation, and the WCTU with its many country Unions, was the instrument in organising the petition. It was the largest ever presented to Parliament and staggered those who had scornfully declared that no self-respecting woman wanted to vote.<sup>6</sup>

### Who signed the Monster Petition?

Signatures were gathered on individual sheets of paper that were then pasted together to form one large petition. Often people in the same street or town are listed in one section; in other cases, sheets containing groups of women were separated in the women's haste to compile the petition.

In 2004, the Public Record Office Victoria, Parliament of Victoria, League of Women Voters, the Genealogical Society of Victoria and the Royal Historical Society

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## New expressions such as 'the woman question' and 'women's rights' drew attention to the worldwide movement to gain the female franchise.

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of Victoria combined in a project to transcribe the names on the petition into a searchable database. This database has become a useful resource for family and local history research, as it is now possible to see who signed the petition and to view the individual women's signatures. Searches can be undertaken in a variety of ways, for example of politically active women in different neighbourhoods, or even to find out if family members signed. The petition can be searched on the website: [www.parliament.vic.gov.au/womenspetition](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/womenspetition).

A number of historical societies and genealogical groups are undertaking projects to locate and provide additional information about particular groups of women who signed the petition. To date, societies in Geelong, Casterton, Williamstown and Whitehorse have created online databases. With limited primary sources available for research into the lives of nineteenth century women, it is often a difficult pursuit to identify the signatories, and the work undertaken by these groups in identifying the women is enormously valuable.

As Brienne Callahan tells us in her article on the female signatories of Davis Street, North Carlton:

The names of Henrietta Dugdale, Bessie Lee, Vida Goldstein and the like grace the pages of many Australian histories; their sacrifices and achievements have warranted such an honour. But what about the other suffragists? Although Jessie Ferguson of 49 Davis Street may have ruled her home, she was not among the lofty names on the petition; she was the wife of a bootmaker.<sup>7</sup>

The first signatory, Margaret McLean, holds a special place in the history of Australian female suffrage and women's rights: she was one of the founders of the Victorian branch of the WCTU and, in her capacity as president, presented the Monster Petition to Premier Munro in September 1891. Elected president of the Melbourne branch of the WCTU at its formation in November 1887, she became colonial president in 1891 and served two more terms as State president: in 1892–93 and from 1899 until 1907 when she retired

with failing health. She moved the motion for the formation of the National Council of Women in 1902 and throughout her life worked tirelessly for women's issues, such as universal education, the appointment of police matrons and raising the age of consent.

Anthea Hyslop's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* provides an overview of Margaret's life, recognising her role in the WCTU as one of its 'foremost advocates of votes for women'. Hyslop identifies Margaret as 'helping to organise the women's petition for the franchise',<sup>8</sup> but it is now evident that Margaret's involvement went far beyond just 'helping to organise' the petition.

Margaret's skill as a speaker was developed through her teaching background. Having undertaken teacher training in 1862–64 at the newly formed Melbourne Training Institution for Teachers, Margaret taught at St James Cathedral School until her marriage to William McLean in 1869.<sup>9</sup> Throughout her life, she promoted education as the key to social reform, and this belief in women's education is reflected in the careers of her daughters.

Ethel, the eldest, distinguished herself at the University of Melbourne where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1900. She became head of staff at Lauriston Girls' School and was a founding and long-serving council member of the Assistant Mistresses' Association of Victoria.<sup>10</sup> Winnie became a nurse; Jessie a graphic artist; while Hilda was a missionary for over thirty years in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), a distinguished student of classical Hindu texts and Islam, and author of two books. Alice was one of the first women in Victoria to hold a medical degree from the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1906 with two degrees: medicine and a Bachelor of Science. She gained practical experience at the Queen Victoria Hospital and worked at the Women's Hospital during World War I. She was for many years a Baptist missionary in India with her husband, the Reverend Lorraine Barber, and later studied psychiatry in England before returning home to practise psychotherapy, making an influential contribution to its establishment in Melbourne.<sup>11</sup>



Margaret McLean, the first signatory on the Monster Petition. A WCTU white ribbon badge is pinned to her lapel.

By encouraging women's education and professional training, Margaret aimed to remove any barriers that might prevent them from entering particular occupations. She argued that women's work should be considered equal to men's in both cultural standing and wage rates, when it was of the same type. This approach to women's education can be clearly seen in her first presidential address, when she urged each member of the WCTU to:

... give some portion ... of her time for reading, and to informing herself upon the working out of our principles. We must not only say to others, 'Come and join us', but we must be able to give good and sufficient reasons for their doing so, and to do this we must educate ourselves. We shall thus not only be far more useful, but strengthen ourselves also.<sup>12</sup>

The WCTU was non-aligned politically and democratic in outlook and, according to Hyslop, 'found parliamentary support for its interests among liberals and radicals rather than conservatives'.<sup>13</sup> While maintaining the central aim of the abolition of the liquor trade, WCTU members embraced a much wider range of social and moral reforms. They deplored the double standard of sexual morality and sought to address a range of women's issues including: prison reform; children's

courts; kindergartens; raising the age of consent; and the introduction of female factory inspectors, the first of whom took up her duties early in 1894.<sup>14</sup> It was during Margaret's presidency in 1893, that the WCTU began advocating equal pay.

The WCTU gave this scholarly woman the opportunity to move from the domestic sphere to the public domain and to use her valuable speaking skills to support women's suffrage. A natural leader and a capable organiser, Margaret was able to use the media to good advantage, to interview leaders and to speak from the pulpit or stage, at a time when women who performed such tasks were mocked in the public arena. Prior to this time, there was almost no political role for women and it was quite revolutionary for women to organise themselves and to speak publicly. As historian Helen Harris observed, there was 'a general trend towards restricting the public persona of women'.<sup>15</sup> *The Bulletin* and *Punch* magazines, with their representations of the bush and the men who inhabited it, were particularly vicious in their portrayal of female temperance workers. But Margaret relished the public role: she led the 1893 deputation to have the age of consent raised from 12 to 16 years, and the successful 1897 WCTU delegation to the Chief Commissioner of Police urging the appointment of women police matrons at lock-ups.<sup>16</sup> In 1900 Margaret was the Australian delegate to the international WCTU



Containing close to 30,000 signatures of women from all walks of life, the original Monster Petition is approximately 260 metres long and made of paper pasted to cotton or linen fabric backing. PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, ORIGINAL PAPERS TABLED IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, UNIT 851, FEMALE SUFFRAGE PETITION, 1891. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

convention in Edinburgh, where she conducted a service in St Giles' Cathedral.<sup>17</sup>

The WCTU brought large numbers of Australian women into the suffrage campaign. Against some opposition from within the WCTU's leadership ranks, caused by concern that women's suffrage would weaken the Union's impact on the temperance question, Margaret promoted political influence as a way to advance women's issues. In 1904, she was the only female speaker in a field of four on the subject of female suffrage at the Melbourne Town Hall, the chairman being Sir Frederick Holder, speaker of the Federal House of Representatives.

Margaret's pamphlets *Womanhood suffrage* (1890) and *More about womanhood suffrage* were circulated throughout Victoria via the WCTU's branch network. Encouraged by Margaret, WCTU members embraced the suffrage campaign, writing letters, distributing pamphlets and holding lectures that advised women about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and as future electors.<sup>18</sup>

Margaret outlined the Union's rationale in adopting suffrage as a platform, 'We want laws which will make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong, laws which will help and not hinder the cause so dear to our hearts'.<sup>19</sup>

The Monster Petition was followed up by a letter, which Margaret signed in May 1892 on behalf of the WCTU, addressed to all the successful parliamentary candidates. She wrote:

As women deeply concerned in the highest welfare of the nation ... we urge you to use all your influence on the side of prohibition by giving the people the veto power against all licenses, including club-permits. Under the head of People we would respectfully urge the inclusion of women. Women are regarded as people when taxes are levied, when guilty of any breach of law, when the census is taken, and in every case except in the election of lawmakers, or in the formation of laws they are compelled to obey.<sup>20</sup>

Margaret was politically astute, and saw the benefits of combined action for women's rights. In 1902, at a meeting of representatives of 35 voluntary societies, held at the Austral Salon and chaired by Lady Janet Clarke, Margaret moved the motion for the formation of the National Council of Women. The establishment of the National Council of Women enabled women to work together for necessary reforms in society and gave a wider platform to the suffrage campaign, eventually leading to success for Victorian women in 1908.

### Evolution of an icon

Although women in Victoria – the last state in Australia to enfranchise women – did not gain the right to vote in state elections until 1908, the Monster Petition was instrumental in raising the profile of the women's suffrage movement. It argued for the vote simply as a measure of justice because:



*Great Petition* by Susan Hewitt and Penelope Lee, in Burston Reserve, Melbourne. PHOTOGRAPH: DIANE DILORIO. SOURCE: ARTS VICTORIA



- Parliament should be a reflection of the wishes of the people
- a Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, should mean all the people and not one half
- most laws affect women as much as men.

This simple petition, which embraced all ethnicities and all political and religious beliefs, was immediately

### The 1891 Monster Petition has captured the hearts and minds of Victorians.

adopted by Victorian women. By signing this petition, radicals and conservatives united to bring about change.

But the parliament was not moved by the mammoth show of support for

female suffrage demonstrated in the Monster Petition, and the petition was stored in the cellar of Parliament House where it languished for one hundred years. The Monster Petition received its first modern-day airing in August 1995 when it was displayed in Queens Hall to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League of Women Voters.<sup>21</sup> It was included on the Victorian Heritage Register in August 2007 and inscribed into the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register on 20 February 2008.

As a tribute to the 1891 Petition, the Victorian government sponsored a commemorative petition for Victorian women to identify key issues for the next one hundred years as part of the *Centenary of Federation* activities. This new petition contained over 41,000

signatures and was presented by Judy Maddigan MP to the Victorian Premier on 7 May 2001. The first signature was that of Wurundjeri elder Joy Murphy who could not have signed the original petition because, as an Aborigine, she had no legal status. Full voting rights were not granted to indigenous Australians until 1962. On the 2001 petition the signature of Terry Bracks – wife of then Premier Steve Bracks – occupies the second position, alluding to the signature of Mrs. James Munro, wife of the Premier in 1891.

### Conclusion

Margaret McLean, like others who were instrumental in gathering the signatures for the Monster Petition, worked tirelessly for the female franchise campaign. Women's access to education, health care and paid labour has improved due to the efforts of these suffragists. The women involved in the various suffrage and temperance societies gave Victorian women greater autonomy and protection and, by the time Victorian women had been granted the vote in 1908, the social and political foundations of fundamental change in gender relations had been established.

The 1891 Monster Petition has captured the hearts and minds of Victorians. It holds a central place in the battle for votes for women and has become an icon representing the wider issue of women's role in society. With the installation of *Great Petition* in Burston Reserve, we have a permanent reminder of the extraordinary effort expended to gain the right to vote for Victorian women.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For information and to view and search the Women's Suffrage Petition go to <[http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/index.php/1891\\_Women's\\_Suffrage\\_Petition](http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/index.php/1891_Women's_Suffrage_Petition)>.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism, 1880–1914', in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: domination and negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, 1992, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> <[http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/index.php/1891\\_Women's\\_Suffrage\\_Petition](http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/index.php/1891_Women's_Suffrage_Petition)>

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. C Wallace, WCTU 4th Annual General Meeting, WCTU and the woman's suffrage petition, <[http://210.15.209.254/Petition/WCTU\\_Franchise\\_Dept.html](http://210.15.209.254/Petition/WCTU_Franchise_Dept.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> *Alliance Record*, 22 August 1891, p. 207, extract, WCTU and the woman's suffrage petition, <<http://210.15.209.254/Petition/Collecting.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> Isabel McCorkindale (ed.), *Pioneer Pathways: sixty years of citizenship, 1887–1947*, WCTU, Melbourne, 1948, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Brienne Callahan, 'The "Monster Petition" and the Women of Davis Street', *Provenance: the journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, <<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/provenance/no7/MonsterPetition1.asp>>.

<sup>8</sup> Anthea Hyslop, 'McLean, Margaret (1845–1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1986, p. 331.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Rasmussen, *Lauriston: 100 years of educating girls 1901–2000*, Helicon Press, Melbourne, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Hyslop, *loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> 4th Annual Report of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1891, President's Address, pp. 25–27.

<sup>13</sup> Anthea Hyslop, 'Temperate Feminists: Marie Kirk and the WCTU' in Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (eds), *Double Time: women in Victoria, 150 years*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1985, p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Grimshaw et al, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, 1994, p. 174.

<sup>15</sup> Helen D. Harris, *Helen Hart: founder of women's suffrage in Australasia*, Harriland Press, Forest Hill, 2009, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> McCorkindale, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Hyslop in Lake and Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> *Alliance Record*, 29 November 1890, pp. 284–285 as quoted by Hyslop in Lake and Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121.

<sup>20</sup> 5th Annual Report of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1892, pp. 8–9.

<sup>21</sup> Liz Prideaux, *The Age of Suff-Rage: Celebrating the Centenary of Women's Suffrage in Victoria 1908–2008*, second edition, March 2008.

# AN ENIGMATIC VICE-CHANCELLOR

## Raymond Priestley at the University of Melbourne 1935–1938

Fay Woodhouse

In 1935 the University of Melbourne's first salaried Vice-Chancellor, Raymond Priestley, arrived in Melbourne, eager to lead the small antipodean university. He was surprised at what he found: a lack of funds and a general disconnection between the University and the people of Melbourne that restricted his progressive ideas.

This paper contextualises Raymond Priestley's campaign to connect the University to the people. The 1930s were a tumultuous time politically, both in Australia and internationally; this was reflected in the attitude and activities of the students and the University Council, which frustrated Priestley's attempts at reform and eventually led to his resignation. While Priestley only stayed in Melbourne for three years, his legacy can still be seen at the University and his influence cannot be underestimated.

### Introduction

Raymond Edward Priestley arrived in Melbourne from Cambridge University in February 1935 to take up the duties of the first full-time Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. For the first eighty years of the University's existence, the positions of Chancellor, Deputy-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor had been honorary. Amendments to the University's constitution in 1933 established the salaried position; it was advertised in Australia and overseas. While Australian contenders for the positions were considered, Priestley was appointed in 1934. The major power brokers on the University Council, however, failed to grasp the significance of the salaried executive role. Historian Ron Ridley neatly summarises the situation: 'Those who had been accustomed, or expected, to exercise power pretended that nothing had changed.'<sup>1</sup> Soon after Priestley's arrival the political landscape and financial plight of the University were laid bare before him.

Priestley's tenure as Vice-Chancellor was short-lived: he stayed only three years, yet his legacy lives on. Geoffrey Blainey has said that, in his brief time in Australia, Priestley established a reputation as probably the country's most 'dynamic and invigorating educationist'.<sup>2</sup> Historians of the University, Dick Selleck and Stuart Macintyre, also conclude that he proved to be a dynamic 'if a somewhat enigmatic vice-chancellor'.<sup>3</sup> Priestley's diaries convey the upheaval he lived through and the outcomes he shaped. Looking back, Priestley himself remarked that he was somewhat amazed at his boldness at the time.<sup>4</sup> His influence and importance to the University cannot be underestimated, yet his personal story remains largely unexplored.

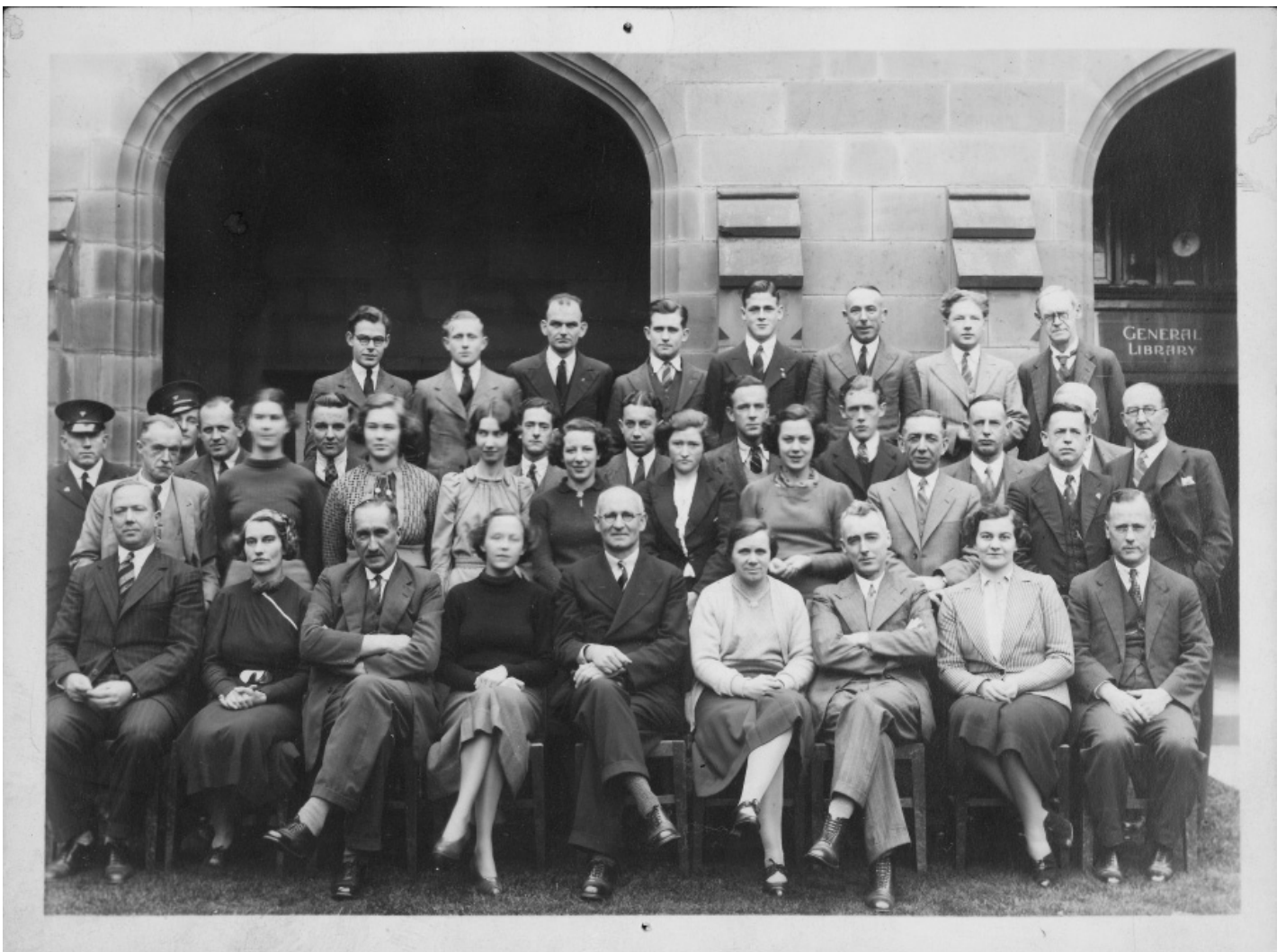
This paper contextualises Raymond Priestley's campaign to connect the University to the people of Melbourne. He approached wealthy industrialists and

businessmen and soon convinced them of the need to support the University. This produced positive results. Some major benefactions were achieved during his brief tenure, while others came to fruition under the stewardship of his successor, John Medley.

Raymond Priestley kept a Melbourne journal from 1935 to 1938. In it he diligently recorded his daily activities – meetings, lunches, dinners, receptions, and sometimes the weather. These diaries were kept for a number of reasons and were never intended to be private documents; rather they were written as public documents. He revealed in 1937 that the diary was written for two audiences. The first was his family in England; the second his Cambridge colleagues. He wrote to his family insisting that for his Clare College friends 'I have written to some of them and suggested that if they want news that is the best source'.<sup>5</sup> Priestley knew his audiences and wrote with specific purposes. He aimed to inform his audience of his experiences, good and bad; the state of the Australian university system; the challenges he faced; and his hopes and aspirations for the role of Vice-Chancellor in an antipodean university. He would also have known that future historians of the University of Melbourne and of Australian tertiary education would, in time, read these diaries with great interest, not least to capture a sense of the turbulence of the times. However, a close examination of his diary entries reveals a surprising regularity of entries expressing the view that he would be forced, under certain conditions, to leave Melbourne and return to England sooner than expected: he anticipated staying a minimum of five years. These entries soon became as interesting to me as the major milestones he was reaching with the government, business and the wider community.



UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE



This paper is a brief examination of Priestley's tenure as Vice-Chancellor. It highlights some of his ideals for a university, and summarises his significant achievements. It also aims to reveal, as much as possible, the nature of Priestley's character in an attempt to understand his rationale for accepting the position in Australia and the reasons for his resignation after such a brief stay.

### Decades of disaster, decay and indecision

From 1853 the positions of Chancellor, Deputy-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor were honorary. However, following revelations in 1901 of an embezzlement of £23,000 over a 19-year period by the University's accountant,<sup>6</sup> Council quickly applied austerity measures. The Fink Report, which followed a Royal Commission into the embezzlement, recommended appointing a salaried Vice-Chancellor to 'bring this University into line with almost all other British Universities'.<sup>7</sup> Despite these recommendations and further amendments to the *University Act 1923*, the positions of Chancellor, Deputy-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor remained honorary. It was not until 1933 that a Bill to authorise the appointment of an executive Vice-Chancellor was passed in State Parliament.<sup>8</sup> The University of Sydney had appointed a salaried Vice-Chancellor in 1924.<sup>9</sup> The navigator of the bill through the Parliament was none other than the Attorney-General, Robert Gordon Menzies, a former student of the University and a member of Council.<sup>10</sup> Menzies argued that the appointment of a salaried Vice-Chancellor would result in the more efficient running of the University because he would be the chief executive in charge of the administration of the University.<sup>11</sup> He would have the same standing and qualifications as Vice-Chancellors in most British universities.<sup>12</sup> In his second reading speech Menzies emphasised the work and importance of the University to the community:

The duty of a University is not merely to teach people and grant them degrees, or turn them out with certificates which will enable them to earn a living – the duty of the University is to lead the community in research, and in the further conquest of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Opposite top: Drawing (author unknown) of the north face of the Raymond Priestley administrative building, completed in 1969. The building was designed by University Architect, Rae Featherstone. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVES, UMA/1/1503

Opposite bottom: Group photograph of the small administrative staff at the University of Melbourne, c. 1937. Raymond Priestley is seated centre front row. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVES, UMA/1/1417

Right: Northern Party of Scott's Second Antarctic Expedition 1910–1912. Raymond Priestley is far right standing in front of the flag. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVES, UMA/1/1941

Menzies fought hard for the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor, and in July 1933 successfully steered the *University Act 1933* through State Parliament.<sup>14</sup> As it transpired, Menzies' aspirations for the University were closely aligned with Priestley's views of a university and their relationship proved to be fruitful. Menzies remained a member of Council until 1934, when he inadvertently forfeited his seat through in-attendance.<sup>15</sup>

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Whether or not he was initially reluctant to come to Melbourne, his achievements changed the direction of the University during the turbulent years of the 1930s.

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The University of Melbourne in 1935 was a community of around 3,500 students and around 85 full-time professors and lecturers. The student body represented a small and select component of the population of Victoria. Because the annual cost of a university course was much higher than the annual average wage, students were predominantly the children of the wealthy middle and upper classes. Generally privately educated, they understood the leadership role they would very likely assume in their future professional lives. They also appreciated that the networks they established would be pivotal to their careers. The view of the University as an élite institution was well founded.



### Enter Raymond Priestley: geologist, Antarctic explorer, educator and administrator

Raymond Edward Priestley was born on 20 July 1886 at Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, England; his upbringing was 'staunch Methodist'.<sup>16</sup> Priestley was an intrepid man who had achieved distinction as an Antarctic explorer before his academic career. In the final year of his science course at University College, Bristol, he had been appointed geologist to Ernest Shackleton's first expedition to the Antarctic from 1907 to 1909. While working with Professor Edgeworth David at Sydney University on the expedition's geological reports, he was recruited to the second and ill-fated Antarctic expedition of 1910–13 led by Robert Falcon Scott. Priestley carried out glaciological and geological surveys and discovered several large glaciers, one of which was named after him. His major work was with the northern party, which became ice-bound at Terra Nova Bay. The party remained on the desolate coast for eleven months, surviving the winter in summer outfits by digging a snow cave, and living on seal and penguin meat.<sup>17</sup> They were eventually picked up and returned to the expedition's base at Cape Evans. From 1914 to 1917 Priestley served as adjutant to the Wireless Training Centre. In 1918 he was awarded the Military Cross while serving with the Signal Company of the 46th Division in France.

After graduating BA in 1920, and completing a Diploma of Agriculture at Christ's College, Cambridge, Priestley was elected a fellow of Clare College in 1922. In 1924 he joined the University's administrative staff. He was an acknowledged and able administrator.

Priestley was first approached informally about the position in Melbourne in 1932 by his former Cambridge colleague, the Melbourne Professor of Agriculture, Samuel Wadham. He wrote to Wadham that: 'the possibility you mention would be one that would attract me particularly' as I have 'hankered after a return to Australia'.<sup>18</sup> A further letter to Wadham confirmed 'that Melbourne would attract me more than any other University at home or overseas'.<sup>19</sup>

In 1934, when he was officially approached for the position of Vice-Chancellor, Priestley simultaneously held the position of Assistant Registrar, Secretary of the Board of Research Studies and Secretary-General of the Faculties at the University of Cambridge. Stephen Murray-Smith's *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry argues that Priestley 'somewhat reluctantly' accepted the Melbourne appointment at £2,000 per year with allowances.<sup>20</sup> Poynter and Rasmussen suggest that he was 'persuaded to accept the position ... leading an old, under-funded Dominion university'.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not he was initially reluctant to come to Melbourne, his achievements changed the direction of the University during the turbulent years of the 1930s.

### Arrival and first impressions

Raymond and Phyllis Priestley and their oldest daughter Jocelyn departed Liverpool on the *Nestor* on 5 January 1935; they reached Melbourne in a little over five weeks. On the outward sea journey, Priestley read extensively on current thinking and trends in British, American and Canadian universities. On 9 February



the ship docked at Fremantle for several days. While in Western Australia, the Priestleys were invited to visit the University. Here they met the Chancellor, Sir Walter James, the Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Education.<sup>22</sup> The next port of call was Adelaide, where they met Professor Chapman, the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the University, and several professorial staff. During

these visits Priestley discussed issues of importance to the universities of Australia while his hosts provided valuable information about the University of Melbourne. Following discussions with the two Vice-Chancellors he visited, Priestley concluded that for the first year he would need to have 'open eyes and ears' but a closed mouth.<sup>23</sup> He was soon to change his mind on that.



Vice-Chancellor Raymond Priestley sitting for his official portrait painted by W. B. McInnes in 1938. The original painting was destroyed in the Wilson Hall fire of 1952. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVES, SIR RAYMOND EDWARD PRIESTLEY COLLECTION, ACC. NO. 73/79, BOX 8, SERIES 1/15

On 18 February the Priestleys arrived in Melbourne. They were greeted by a delegation from the University and six reporters from Melbourne newspapers.<sup>24</sup> At his press interview, Priestley avoided any 'pronouncements about policy in the past or in the future at Melbourne'.<sup>25</sup> Introductions to a number of professors followed the interview. A brief sightseeing tour of Melbourne on the way to the University included the recently opened Shrine of Remembrance.<sup>26</sup> After arriving at the University, they met the Registrar, John Bainbridge and some professorial staff. Once the introductions at the University had been made on the first day, Priestley was escorted to meet Sir Stanley Argyle, the Premier of Victoria. Argyle invited Priestley to call on him either 'as Premier or as a member of the University Council' whenever he thought it 'might be useful to him'.<sup>27</sup>

Priestley's position as Vice-Chancellor of the University carried substantial prestige in the city and the State; his status was equivalent to that of a highly respected politician or business leader. He was immediately nominated for membership of the Melbourne and Rotary Clubs.

The students did not meet Priestley for some weeks. They knew of his presence but probably thought little of it, even though the first edition of the student newspaper, *Farrago*, carried a message from the University to him.<sup>28</sup>

Within three days of his arrival in Melbourne Priestley identified the major issues he would have to contend with. On 21 February, after attending an evening reception he committed to his diary:

The present lack of contact between the University and the City was again emphasised, and the fact that, though the University has always had distinguished men on its staff, these have never been identified with the institution by the City and the State which looks upon the University rather as a degree-giving institution and hears about it mainly through its examination list.

To my remark that I found it difficult to see why this should be in the case of a University which was sending out a constant stream of graduates into local positions and local life they replied that there was little *esprit de corps* in the student body who were themselves rather inclined to take the same view of the University, a fact connoted by the nickname they give it 'The Shop'.<sup>29</sup>

He saw immediately that his foremost tasks were to change the attitude of the students towards their institution – to lobby the government for increased funds – while at the same time encouraging the community to rethink its perception of what the University could be. He quickly perceived the situation he had inherited; this must surely have caused him consternation from his first days in Melbourne.

One week after his arrival he visited the Union building for the first time; the experience made him 'more than ever sure that the first urgent reform' should be upgrading the Union and other buildings.<sup>30</sup> He saw the necessity of 'fostering a different spirit' to the one he found. That could best be achieved by the provision of new buildings to make a social space for the students.<sup>31</sup> He also saw that the major problem with the University was its financial starvation over a long time. The Council 'junta' Blainey wrote of had seen the banks crash in the 1890s and the 1901 embezzlement accentuated their financial caution.<sup>32</sup> This behaviour is described by Poynter and Rasmussen as 'an extraordinary explanation for the Council's financial timidity'.<sup>33</sup>

As well as countering the negative internal and external attitudes toward the University, Priestley saw the need to define and document the new roles of Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor. By mid-March Priestley had had his 'first fight over University policy'.<sup>34</sup> He saw that behind some rather important and urgent items of business lay the whole question of duties and responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor. In an interview with the Chancellor, Sir John MacFarland, on the day he arrived in Melbourne, Sir John had advised Priestley to 'ride ruthlessly over any opposition', a coded reference to the dominating personality of Sir James Barrett, the Deputy-Chancellor.<sup>35</sup> His inaugural speech to the University and the student body included a specific reference to himself as Administrative Head of the University. He had taken over the duties formerly performed by the Honorary Officers and President of the Professorial Board.<sup>36</sup> Barrett, if he understood the reference, chose to ignore it.

### **Walking a tightrope: should I stay or should I go?**

It is evident from diary entries less than one month after his arrival that Priestley was considering the possibility that his time in Melbourne would be brief. The state of the buildings, the obvious financial problems, and his increasing awareness that Barrett simply failed to understand the new Vice-Chancellor's status, caused Priestley great anxiety. Entries such as the following became regular features of his daily diary. Appalled at the state of the buildings he wrote:

If ... no change for the better takes place then I think that my friends at Cambridge might well proceed to make a hole for me in England again.<sup>37</sup>

A few days later he wrote:

I told my cicerones in a moment of exasperation that if I could not get this bettered within five years I would go. And I place on record as a time limit set as a maximum by myself.<sup>38</sup>

These entries, the first of many such statements, were made only six weeks after his arrival. Some months later he wrote:

More and more one is forced to come to the opinion that my usefulness here is dependent upon an increase in the income of the University from some source, and a considerable one at that, and that if no such increase came along in the next five years it would probably be in the best interests both of the University and of myself to migrate. But I am sanguine enough to hope that money may be obtained though I am not one of those who would fear additional Government help for fear of the control that might accompany it.<sup>39</sup>

Priestley felt constrained in his aims for a liberal university. He wanted to create an academic community and he wanted students to see their university as much more than 'the Shop'. To achieve this, he understood that adequate buildings were required. He set about his task.

He made his first major project an appeal for funds to build a new Union House. His call for the new Union House, which he saw as fundamental to a true University, was well received. He wrote that his ideal of a university education, which

included the possibility of free speech and free inquiry, depended on an appropriate environment:

No one can justly claim that the present Union buildings fulfil this need. They compare unfavourably with any Union that I have seen or of which I have ever read. We wish to replace them with better ones, built for the purpose ... Past generations of students have helped substantially ... we are asking them to assist again as graduates – this time with knowledge, and altruism.<sup>40</sup>

His launch of the Appeal appeared in a dedicated edition of *Farrago* on 4 July 1935. The students appeared enthusiastic and later presented a cheque for £6,000 towards a new 'Club house'.<sup>41</sup>

His second concern was the relationship between the University, the city and the government. Priestley discussed this topic with anyone and everyone: it became his hobbyhorse. He also promoted the ideal that the University must be the home of free thought. This was a concept many members of Council had traditionally found impossible to grasp; it was the issue that ultimately led to his resignation in 1937. In mid-July 1935, after a discussion about free speech, he wrote: 'I may yet be in the position of having to leave

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**Under his guidance and direction, the University of Melbourne was dragged, reluctantly, into the twentieth century.**

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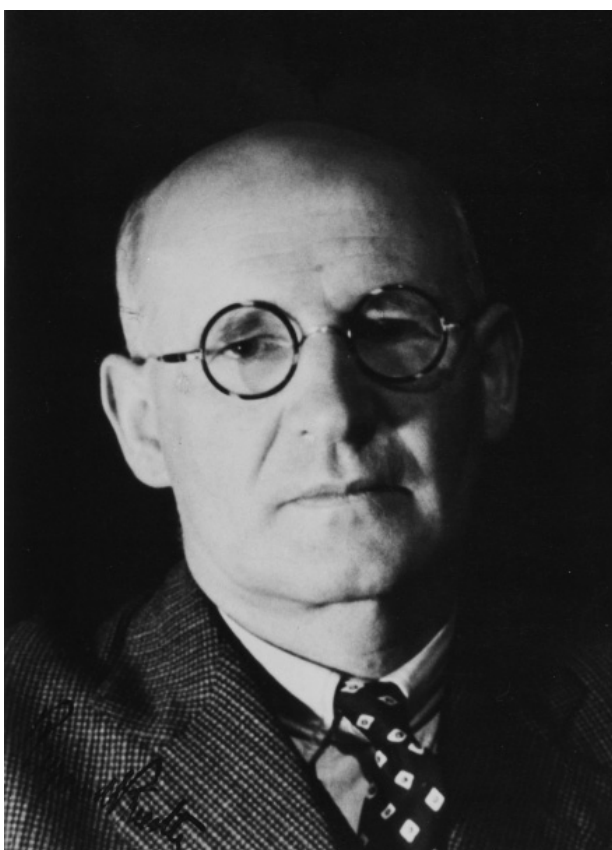


The Vice-Chancellor's residence today. Designed by Harry Norris, the house was a gift of Herbert Brookes and George Nicholas and constructed in 1937 but was never occupied by the Priestley family. PHOTOGRAPH: FAY WOODHOUSE



my new University for the University's good'.<sup>42</sup>

Despite his increasing levels of frustration with the attitudes of the University, the community and the students, there was much work to be done. An invitation to the Victorian State Parliament proved a fruitful first step in changing long-held community attitudes. On 31 July 1935, 45 members of both houses of Parliament, including the Premier and the Ministers for Health, Education and Agriculture, accepted his invitation to visit and inspect the University, its buildings and grounds. Despite a successful day with the visitors, Priestley noted bleakly that night that the 'Premier was sympathetic but not very encouraging'. He also recorded that the State Budget had been published that morning and 'there is nothing in it at all about higher education'.<sup>43</sup> He was clearly disheartened!



Raymond Priestley on the eve of his departure from Melbourne in 1938. UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVES, UMA/1/950

Priestley had conceived of the idea of taking an overseas study tour of British and American universities 'in order to plan for the dragging of the University of Melbourne into the twentieth century'.<sup>44</sup> He applied to the Carnegie Foundation who funded his trip. He was away from February to September 1936. What struck him most forcibly was the vast sums of money granted to most of the universities he visited, a far cry from the pittance made available to the University of Melbourne. He returned to Australia in September 1936, ready to fight with renewed vigour for greater state funding, or to leave Melbourne and return to England.

As Ridley notes, Priestley had barely returned to Melbourne when the three issues of major contention surfaced and eventually led to his resignation.<sup>45</sup> The statutes had not yet been altered to reflect the changed status of the Vice-Chancellor. The lack of formal recognition of the salaried role troubled Priestley; however he did not act on it until two other events forced his hand. In March 1937, the long-running battle between the Communist and Catholic factions on campus came to a head when a debate about the Spanish Civil War ended in chaos. The Chancellor demanded a full report, as if Priestley were his subordinate. The matter was discussed at Council and Barrett 'caved in', yet to Priestley this was the last straw. He wrote:

There is no room here for a Vice-Chancellor ... unless he is prepared to be a man of straw. And I am not. So Bert<sup>46</sup> can act with the knowledge that I should accept any reasonable post at home where I can at the same time keep my self-respect and avoid a stroke.<sup>47</sup>

In the middle of June 1937, Priestley heard that the University of Birmingham was interested in offering him the Vice-Chancellorship. He made clear to Council that unless the University received an additional £25,000 per annum from the Victorian government, he would go. The August budget announced that the University would receive only £10,000. Soon after the budget announcement, he received a formal offer from the University of Birmingham. He sent his letter of resignation to the University Council on 26 August, effective June 1938. Paradoxically, no sooner had Priestley resigned, than money started pouring into the University coffers. It was too little too late for Priestley. He left Melbourne at the end of June 1938.

In the short space of three years Priestley had 'cajoled' the Council, the state government and private benefactors into providing the money for significant new building works.<sup>48</sup> The Raymond Priestley building, the Student Union and the Vice-Chancellor's residence commemorate Raymond Priestley's brief time in Melbourne. His presence at the University was vital to the twentieth century development of many aspects of the University's culture and governance. Under his guidance and direction, the University of Melbourne was dragged, reluctantly, into the twentieth century. It was forced to become less 'a place apart' and more engaged with the community in which it belonged.<sup>49</sup> While his work and influences can still be felt, readers of his diary may still wonder if his decision to come to Melbourne was the right one for him at the time, and if he regretted his decision soon after making it. This, together with the forces he had to contend with, may explain his continuing narrative of disappointment and determination to return to England – an event that, despite his protestations, occurred sooner than he thought or, in the end, possibly hoped.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ronald Ridely (ed.), *The Diary of a Vice-Chancellor: Raymond Priestley, University of Melbourne 1935–1938*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2002, p. xix.
- <sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1957, p. 151.
- <sup>3</sup> Stuart Macintyre and R. J. W. Selleck, *A Short History of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2003, p. 82.
- <sup>4</sup> Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Priestley, Sir Raymond Edward (1886–1974)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988, pp. 295–296.
- <sup>5</sup> Priestley Diaries, 20 May 1935, quoted in Ridely, op. cit., p. xxxiii.
- <sup>6</sup> The University's accountant Frederick James Dickson had kept the accounts in such a masterly manner that he was able to conceal from the Council and the Auditor-General's Department the fact that he had sold some of the University's securities, forged bank deposit books and expertly manipulated other accounts, Blainey, op. cit., pp. 119–120 and Don Garden, *Theodore Fink: a talent for ubiquity*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1998, pp. 128–129.
- <sup>7</sup> This was detailed in the *University Act 1904*; and *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, p. 2695.
- <sup>8</sup> Macintyre and Selleck, op. cit., p. 82.
- <sup>9</sup> Brian Kennedy, *A Passion to Oppose: John Anderson, philosopher*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, p. 78.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>11</sup> R. G. Menzies, University Bill, Legislative Assembly, *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 November 1932, pp. 2694–2699.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2695.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2696.
- <sup>14</sup> John Poynter and Carolyn Rasmussen, *A Place Apart: the University of Melbourne, decades of challenge*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1996, p. 10; Council Minutes, 14 August 1933, p. 173, University of Melbourne Archives.
- <sup>15</sup> Poynter and Rasmussen, op. cit., p. 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Murray-Smith, op. cit., p. 295.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296.
- <sup>18</sup> Letter from Priestley to Wadham, 22 March 1932, 1/2/16/57, Box 17, Wadham Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 8 August 1933.
- <sup>20</sup> Murray-Smith, op. cit., p. 296.
- <sup>21</sup> Poynter and Rasmussen, op. cit., p. 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Sir Walter Hartwell James, KC, KCMG, Hon. LL.D (W. Aust), Chancellor, University of Western Australia 1930–36; Professor Hubert Edward Whitfeld, CBE, BA, BE (Syd.), MIEA, Vice-Chancellor 1927–39; Fred Alexander, *Campus at Crawley: a narrative and critical appreciation of the first fifty years of the University of Western Australia*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963, p. 768.
- <sup>23</sup> Priestley Diaries, 9 February 1935, pp. 143–4, University of Melbourne Archives. Throughout the remainder of the article, reference is made to the Priestley Diaries. Citation of page numbers varies, some remain Priestley's original page number, others are marked on the photocopy of the original diary.

<sup>24</sup> Many of the reporters were students who were employed as 'stringers' for the Melbourne *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* newspapers.

<sup>25</sup> Priestley Diaries, 18 February 1935, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> The brief sight-seeing tour included the Shrine of Remembrance which was opened in November 1934 by Prince Henry, the Duke of Gloucester, son of King George V.

<sup>27</sup> Priestley Diaries, 18 February 1935.

<sup>28</sup> 'The New Vice-Chancellor', *Farrago*, 8 March 1935.

<sup>29</sup> Priestley Diaries, 21 February 1935.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 28 February 1935.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Blainey describes Council as 'A small junta of public-spirited graduates ... Sir John MacFarland, Sir James Barrett, Sir John Grice and Sir John Monash' who continued to dominate the Council and to fashion university policy. MacFarland as Chancellor and Barrett as Deputy-Chancellor were two of the most formidable characters on Council and made it their business to get their own way. Barrett, Macintyre and Selleck write, sat at one end of the Council table and MacFarland at the other, two powerful men and good friends, with the group they controlled sitting between them. 'Those for? Those against? Carried' summarises the nature of Sir John's chairmanship, and woe-betide anyone who disagreed. Macintyre and Selleck rightly describe this behaviour and the decade following the 1923 Act as 'disillusioning'. Blainey, *op. cit.*, p. 145; Macintyre and Selleck, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> Poynter and Rasmussen, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Priestley Diaries, 13 March 1935, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 18 February 1935, pp. 211–212.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 4 April 1935, p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 6 March 1935, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 16 June, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> 'Vice-Chancellor's Views', *Farrago*, 4 July 1935.

<sup>41</sup> Clubbus was the traditional name for the University's Club House.

<sup>42</sup> Priestley Diaries, 14 July 1935.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Ridley, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxv.

<sup>46</sup> Priestley's brother, Bert, at Leeds University.

<sup>47</sup> Priestley Diaries, 24 March 1937.

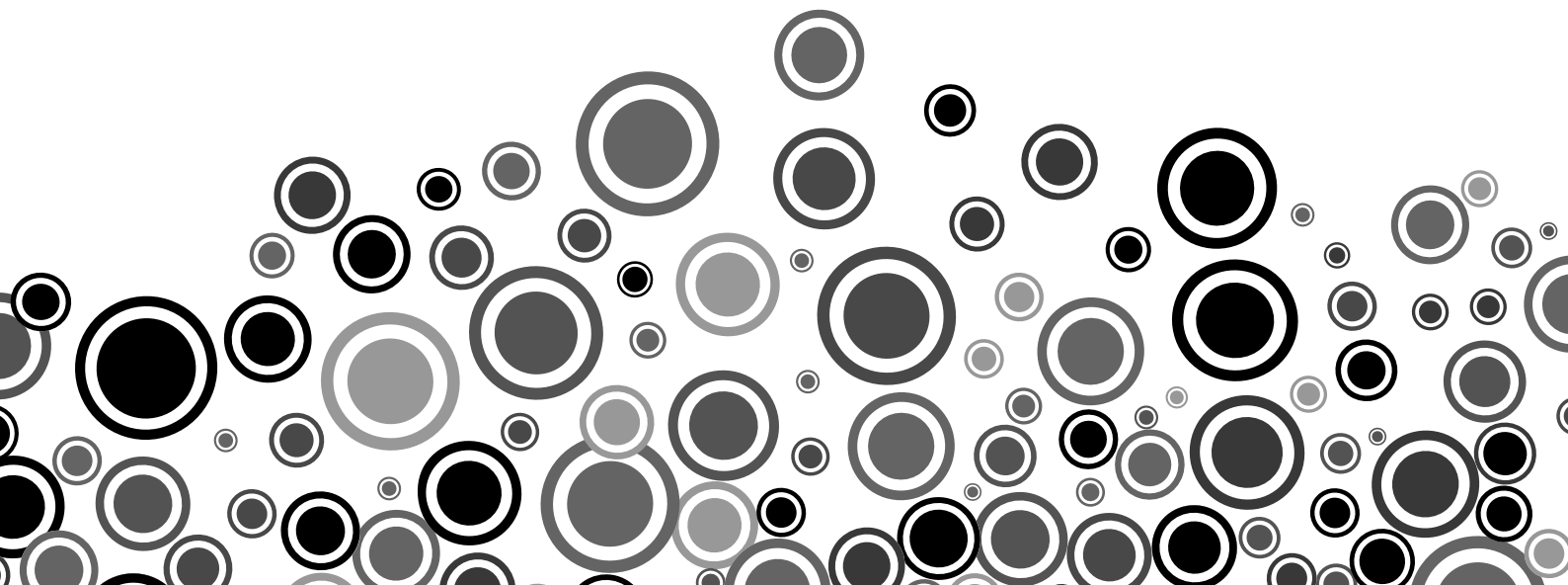
<sup>48</sup> These included the yellow-brick Chemistry Building, the Commerce Building with its grey stone bank façade, Percy Grainger's idiosyncratic museum, the purpose-built Union Building and the Vice-Chancellor's house. Macintyre and Selleck, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

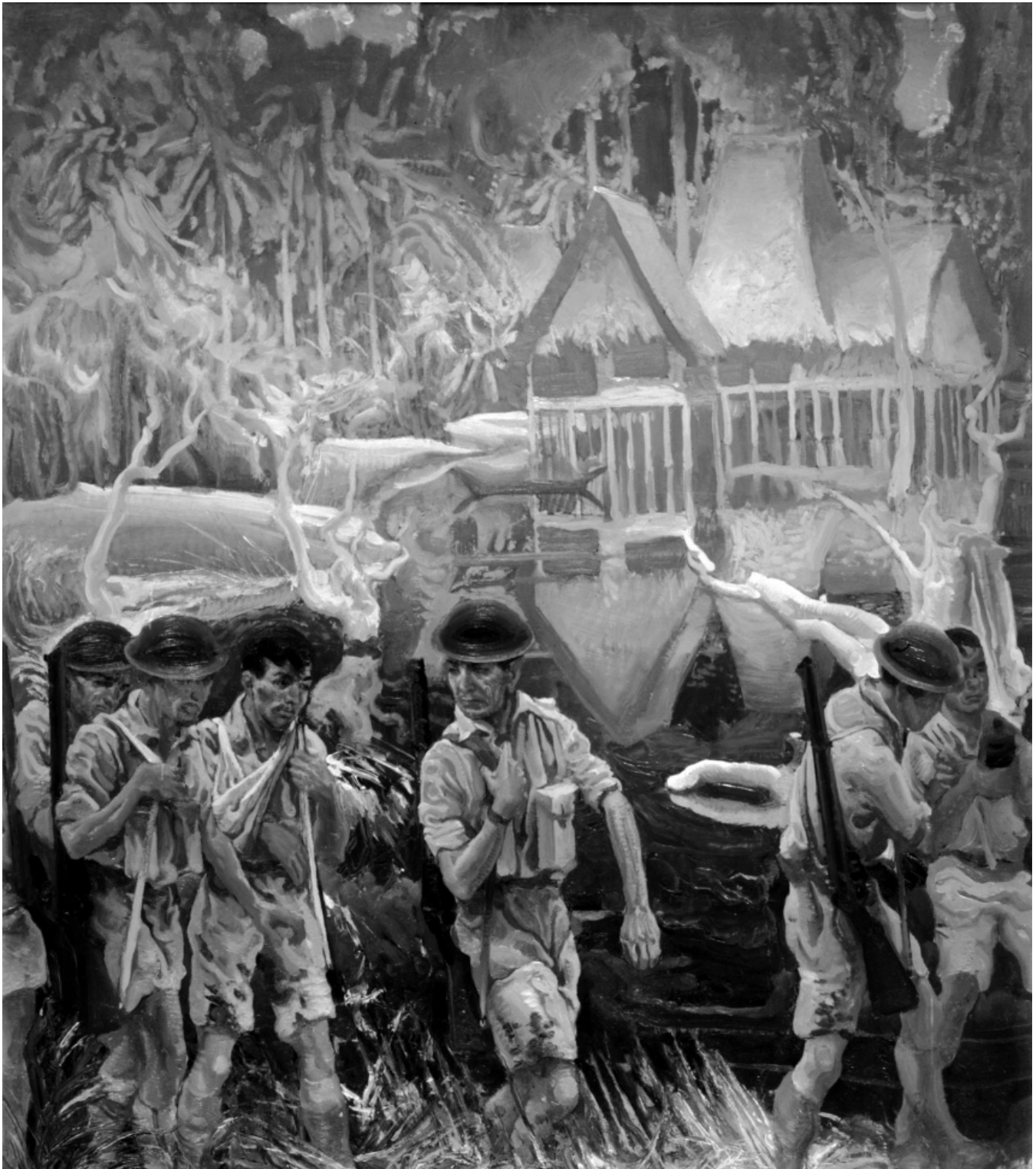
<sup>49</sup> See Poynter and Rasmussen; Fay Woodhouse, 'A place apart? A study of student political engagement at the University of Melbourne 1930–39', PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2001.

Part three

# Reflections

Thinking about history, its impact on us  
and our role in understanding it





Allied troops withdrew from Parit Sulong on 22 January 1942. This painting depicts a group of battle-worn and wounded soldiers, making their way through the Malayan jungle towards Yong Peng.

MURRAY GRIFFIN, *WITHDRAWAL FROM PARIT SULONG*, 1946, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 93.5 x 81.1 CM, AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL (ART26529)

# THE POINT OF PILGRIMAGE

## Parit Sulong 2007

Heather McRae

This article is a reflection about battlefield pilgrimages, with particular reference to a 2007 tour of Singapore and Malaysia by families of the author's father's World War II battalion. The main object of this tour was to attend a service for the dedication of a memorial to the soldiers who risked their lives, fought and died defending Singapore against the advancing Japanese troops in January 1942.

The group visited sites in Singapore and Malaysia, and some of the group continued on to Thailand where members of the battalion laboured as prisoners of war on the Burma–Thailand railway. The article explores the value of pilgrimages: for the participants personally, for the veteran community and its 'extended family', and as a means of increasing historical knowledge and understanding.

In September 2007, I set off on a journey to Parit Sulong in Malaysia, a place I had only recently heard of. The occasion was the dedication of an Australian memorial commemorating the Battle of Muar and its aftermath during World War II. Our tour group comprised descendants and relatives of soldiers who served with the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, defending Singapore against the Japanese advance in 1942. This trip – which we came to regard as a pilgrimage – has had a lasting impact on my life. Since returning home I have sought to identify what I gained as a person, and what I learnt as an historian. In the following article, I will outline the history of the Battle of Muar, describe the commemorations in which I took part, and then consider the outcomes of this pilgrimage. I will also revisit my memories of a backpackers' tour to Turkey in 1990 for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. Both these journeys, though different in character, affirm for me the value of battlefield pilgrimages. While pilgrimage holds personal meaning for the participants, the experience can also contribute to the process of enlarging our historical knowledge and understanding.

The story of Parit Sulong makes grim reading. It is part of the larger history of the Malayan campaign, which began with the Japanese attack at Kota Bharu in north-east Malaya, on 8 December 1941. On 16 January 1942, Japanese forces overran the 45<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade and a support battery of the 2/15<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment at the town of Muar on the south-west coast of Malaya. When the men of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, accompanied by a troop of the 4<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment, took up positions out of Bakri on Saturday 17 January ready to counter this attack, neither they nor their commanders understood the magnitude of the force approaching them down the Muar road. Muar had been taken by the elite Japanese Imperial Guards Division. The Indian and Australian units were unprepared for their fierce

strength, air support and the tactics they employed to powerful effect in the Malayan jungles.

For the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, fighting along the Muar road began on the evening of 17 January. The battalion held its ground and opposed the Japanese advance during increasingly intense combat. The 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived at Bakri on 18 January to provide support. However, they were soon engaged in fighting in their immediate vicinity and were ultimately prevented from joining the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion in an anticipated offensive. With the Japanese isolating the 2/29<sup>th</sup> out on the Muar road, late on 19

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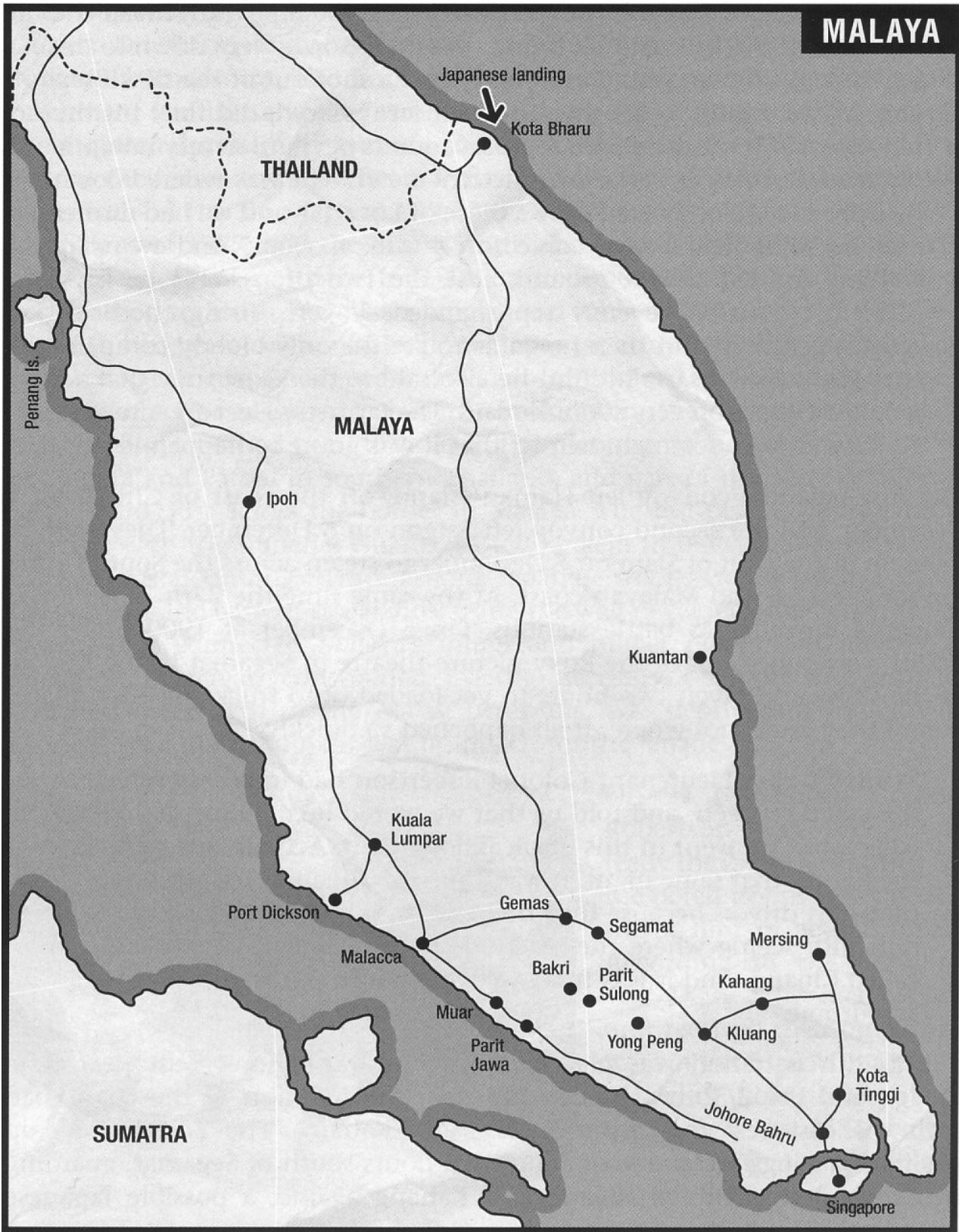
**Our pilgrimage was charged with emotional significance. The ceremonies of remembrance – both formal and familiar to us – heightened the atmosphere.**

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January the battalion was ordered to fight its way back towards Bakri.

Encircled by the enemy and cut off at roadblocks, groups of 2/29<sup>th</sup> men became separated from the main force and made their own way to safety through jungle and swamps. Those that reached Bakri joined a column of Indian and Australian troops, led by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson of the 2/19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in a fighting retreat to Parit Sulong. They arrived at Parit Sulong on 21 January, only to find the bridge across the river in Japanese hands. On 22 January, unable to regain the village and bridge, Anderson ordered a withdrawal across rivers, swamps and steep jungle terrain, aiming for Yong Peng. Anderson was awarded the Victoria Cross for his leadership.

About 150 seriously wounded Australians and Indians were left behind at Parit Sulong, in the belief that they would be treated humanely. Instead, their captors mistreated them and denied them water and medical



Map showing where the Japanese first landed on the Malay peninsula at Kota Bharu on 8 December 1941, and the area in south-west Malaya where the 2/29th Battalion AIF saw action in January 1942.

FROM JOHN LACK (ED.), *NO LOST BATTALION*, P. 72. COURTESY JOHN LACK AND 2/29TH BATTALION AIF ASSOCIATION

attention. Late in the afternoon, tied together with rope and wire, the prisoners were machine-gunned, doused with petrol and set on fire. Lieutenant Ben Hackney of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion was one of three known survivors. His evidence was later provided to the war crimes trial of Lieutenant General Takuma Nishimura, commander of the Imperial Guards Division.

The Australians who found their way back to Allied lines took part in the battle for Singapore. Their subsequent years of suffering as prisoners of war are well known. Nevertheless, these units wish to be remembered not only as victims of Japanese brutality but also as a fighting force. During a week of fighting in Malaya in 1942, despite heavy casualties, they held up the enemy advance, thus protecting the withdrawal of other Allied troops to Yong Peng and beyond. Regarding the Battle of Muar, the official history of Australia in the war of 1939–1945 concludes that 'by their stand at Bakri and by their dogged struggle along the road to Parit Sulong, the force imposed delay on the Japanese advance which was of vital importance at the time'.<sup>1</sup>

Lynette Ramsay Silver examines the massacre at Parit Sulong and the events surrounding it in forensic detail in her book *The Bridge at Parit Sulong*.<sup>2</sup> Lynette Silver first proposed a memorial at Parit Sulong in 1997, but it took 10 years for this project to come to fruition.<sup>3</sup> The resulting memorial, situated in the community park

near the river, pays tribute to 'all those who fought, died and risked their lives at Muar, Bakri and Parit Sulong, January 1942'. Two interpretive panels nearby describe the battle and its aftermath. Lynette Silver was a guest at the dedication of the memorial.

The Australian Government sponsored a tour to Parit Sulong for the memorial service and offered places to veterans of the various units that served in the Battle of Muar and their widows. This group visited sites in Singapore and Malaysia, and participated in the ceremony on 4 September 2007. However, no ex-servicemen or widows of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion felt able to take up this invitation, given their advancing age, health concerns and the demands of the journey. To enable younger generations to attend the ceremony, our tour of family members was organised independently by Doug Ogden, whose father Jake died as a prisoner of war on the Burma-Thailand railway.

My father fought in the Battle of Muar with the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion and survived his time as a prisoner of war in Singapore and Japan. Although Parit Sulong was never mentioned in our household, Muar has been a part of my vocabulary for years. My brother and I grew up attending pilgrimages to Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance every January, commemorating the date the battalion went into battle. Dad's mate Bob Christie is Secretary of the Battalion Association and



Members of the 4th Anti-Tank Regiment in action during the Battle of Muar, 18 January 1942.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL NEGATIVE NUMBER 068592



keeper of its records and memory. After dad's death, we remained in contact with Bob and his family. Bob's daughter, son and daughter-in-law were members of our tour group. Historian John Lack, whose father Jack served with the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, also joined us. Together with a class of his students, John wrote the recently published oral history *No Lost Battalion*, a complement to the official history of the battalion published 20 years earlier.<sup>4</sup> Our tour group ranged from sons who lost their fathers during the war to our youngest member Kerry, granddaughter of Corporal Stanley Barker.

Doug Ogden had previously undertaken his own pilgrimages to this region and wanted to make the experience meaningful for us. The day before the dedication of the memorial, we toured Singapore with our local guide Lawrence Hoe. The Kranji cemetery, Selarang Barracks and Changi Museum were focal points. We spent a full day in Malaysia on 4 September, beginning with an early morning start for the bus trip to Parit Sulong. Kerry laid a floral tribute on behalf of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association during the official service, and sprays of orchids were on hand for relatives and others to place on the memorial.

During the afternoon, our group held its own ceremonies. Beside the Muar road, Janella Christie read out the names and details of each of the men we represented, as we stood in a circle clutching gum leaves and miniature Australian flags. Later in the day, our bus stopped near Kulai, and

we gathered to remember a father and an uncle of members of our group, who joined Chinese guerrilla forces and disappeared in the Malayan jungle. Doug read passages from *A Fearful Freedom*, describing the difficulties and illness faced by these men behind the lines.<sup>5</sup> At both these ceremonies, members of our party read the Ode of Remembrance and Doug played a recording of the Last Post. I returned to Melbourne after the first leg of the journey, but most of the group continued on to Thailand, where they visited Kanchanaburi cemetery and sites along the Burma-Thailand railway.

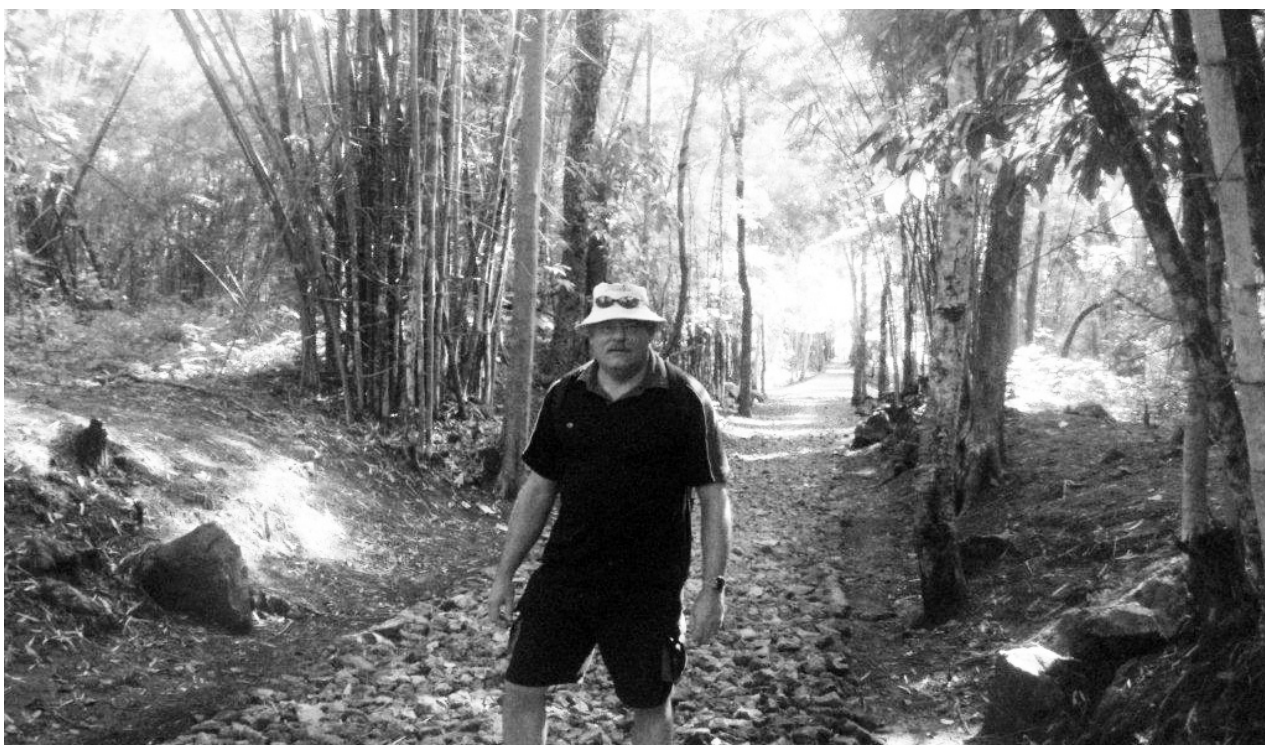
Our pilgrimage was charged with emotional significance. The ceremonies of remembrance – both formal and familiar to us – heightened the atmosphere. The presence of the veteran party and their readings at Parit Sulong touched us too. I remember having a similar response to the Anzac veterans at the Gallipoli ceremonies, who thanked *us* for attending. In Malaysia, though, as the child of a World War II soldier, I was primed to respond to the experience. Gary Simmons likens his anticipation of the journey to that of 'a youngster' who lay awake 'counting the moments to the "big day"'.<sup>6</sup> Our family and personal histories had brought us to this place.

The motivation and value of pilgrimage is, first of all, personal. For those of us who have attended funerals and burials of loved ones, it is hard to imagine the feelings of Edward Burton, who knelt by his father's grave for the

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Even if we wear our fathers' medals, we cannot walk in their shoes.

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Gary Simmons standing at the site of Hintock Station on the Burma-Thailand railway line, preparing to make the trek to Hellfire Pass, September 2007. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY GARY SIMMONS

first time in Singapore in September 2007, or of Colin Stiles, for whom the group later held a ceremony near the spot where his father died in Thailand. These men both spoke movingly about the pilgrimage at one of the Shrine's series of public talks the following year, 'Children of soldiers: a pilgrimage of love'. Media reports have highlighted the importance of 'closure' in connection with the recent discovery of remains of Australian soldiers at the World War I battlefield of Fromelles and the location of the wreck of HMAS *Sydney*, sunk in 1941. Perhaps by walking in the footsteps of their fathers, approaching the places where they died and locating their graves, people like Col and Ed are able to piece together family histories and find ways to mourn. All of us came nearer to understanding our relatives' experiences. One or two of our party felt so close to their fathers that they sensed their presence on the streets of Singapore. Gary experienced a 'poignant' moment standing alone in Hellfire Pass in Thailand, when 'a cold breeze blew past me ... just for a second. No one else felt this breeze.'<sup>7</sup>

Another feature of the trip was the closeness that grew among our group. In one of his emails beforehand, Doug Ogden anticipated that we would 'have a sometimes sad but overall very memorable and satisfying journey. To share these experiences with a common bond and to be able to support each other will give us all great pleasure.'<sup>8</sup> When I arrived at Tullamarine airport I knew only four or five of the group, but our connection with the 2/29<sup>th</sup> gave us a common ground so that conversations soon moved beyond the usual introductions. As the tour progressed, we shed



Colin Stiles, Jack Baker, Heather McRae and Brenda Hodge laying floral tributes at the Parit Sulong memorial, 4 September 2007. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MARG HOGAN

tears and men hugged one another. There was also a great deal of humour and camaraderie. Historian Greg Denning, who accompanied his university students to Melbourne's Anzac Day commemorations over many years, concluded that:

In the end we found not much ideology or nationalism in Anzac Day, unless one listened to the speeches. And we felt, altogether, that the speeches were the last thing to be heard. Compassion was another thing. We found much compassion.<sup>9</sup>

At Parit Sulong, we found compassion for our fathers, their mates, and one another.

We were also conscious that we were representing our families and the battalion. After our day in Malaysia, we did not get back to our hotel in Singapore until after 8 o'clock in the evening. Given the time difference, I waited until the following morning to telephone my mother in Australia at a reasonable hour. However, while many of us gathered in the food court across the road for a late supper, Janella Christie headed to the internet cafe to email news of the day's events to family in Melbourne. We shared our stories with the battalion and wider audiences on our return, and since the tour our sense of connection has drawn many of us to battalion reunions, the January pilgrimages and the Anzac Day march. During the years following the war, reunions were events exclusively for ex-servicemen but in recent decades, the battalion has extended invitations to wives and descendants. Members of the association now

commonly refer to the 2/29<sup>th</sup> 'family'. For those who have not heard their fathers' and grandfathers' wartime memories first-hand, the opportunity to meet men like Bob Christie, with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the battalion, can be invaluable. In turn, the involvement of younger generations has become necessary to support the ongoing administration of the Battalion Association, preserve its history and uphold its memory.

Bruce Scates, in his book about the historical experience of pilgrimage, *Return to Gallipoli*, sets out 'the classic elements of pilgrimage: a quest to recover a part of oneself, an ordeal that traverses time and landscape, catharsis at the grave and/or site and a bonding with fellow pilgrims.' These observations resonate with our experience of the value of pilgrimage for each of us and for our group. Bruce Scates also describes pilgrimage as 'an encounter with history'.<sup>10</sup> Pilgrimage

can be a source of historical understanding. On the beach at Anzac Cove at dawn in 1990, the sight of a ship anchored offshore and the silhouette of a Turkish soldier watching the proceedings from a vantage point on the steep cliffs focussed my mind on the events of 75 years before. Touring through Malaysia, we learnt about the strategic importance of roads, rivers and bridges in the battles of 1942. In Thailand, many of our group trekked along sections of the Burma-Thailand railway. By all accounts, the environment affected them both physically and emotionally. As military historian Peter Stanley argues:

Feeling the enervating humidity of Thailand – and wondering how on earth half-starved prisoners could labour on that bloody railway – is exactly why you should go to Hellfire Pass.<sup>11</sup>

However, there are limits to what the landscape can tell us. Economic historian R.H. Tawney is said to have called upon historians to don stout boots. Peter Stanley, in his recent battlefields guide *A Stout Pair of Boots*, advises us to 'look upon the battlefield with the eyes of a military historian, asking questions and finding answers in the ground'.<sup>12</sup> I first heard of Tawney's words as a student of Public History embarking on field trips to country Victoria. My experience in Singapore and Malaysia highlighted the interplay between documentary and oral sources and historic sites. It also suggested to me that, sometimes, the ground will not provide satisfactory answers. Walking along the roadside

near Bakri in my uncomfortable new shoes, I found it difficult to picture the 2/29<sup>th</sup> in their trenches. Nor did I see my father as Bob Christie recalls him, 'standing against a rubber tree, shooting with a rifle, a cigarette in his mouth, his tin hat at an angle'.<sup>13</sup> The jungles of Malaysia lack the iconic and distinctive features of the Anzac Cove headlands. Our group could not tell how much the surroundings might have changed since the 1940s – although we all agreed that the battalion might have seen the old villa with the date 1934 over its entrance. Doug was armed with a sketch map from Bob Christie, but it was not until Lynette Silver happened upon our gathering by the Muar road that we found out we had misjudged our location.

Although we had difficulty interpreting the battlefields, our awareness of what took place there informed our experience of the pilgrimage. Peter Stanley says, 'you feel these emotions only because of the knowledge you bring to an historical site'.<sup>14</sup> Setting foot on the ground where our fathers fought, suffered and died was significant to us. The solemnity of the occasion and the excitement of being there also had the effect of making us keen to know more. We welcomed Lynette Silver's impromptu roadside lecture and the commentaries of our guides. In terms of background research, we were variously prepared for this tour. A number of the group tested the luggage limit, bringing copies of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion histories and Lynette Silver's book along with them. I had made a start before the trip, but on my return to Melbourne, I resumed my reading with fresh enthusiasm, studying the maps and tracing the strands of



The memorial at Parit Sulong, covered with flowers following the dedication service on 4 September 2007.

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the history. Already there is talk of a second tour, to cover more of the ground. The knowledge that pilgrims bring to a site makes the experience of pilgrimage special, which in turn inspires them to pursue the story further. In this way, pilgrimage becomes part of a continuing process of historical enquiry.

Members of our tour group in Turkey in 1990 were similarly inspired by an 'encounter with history'. The morning after Anzac Day, we toured the battlefields and cemeteries of the Gallipoli peninsula. At one of the cemeteries, someone got hold of an armful of long-stemmed red flowers in cellophane wrappers. One of my photographs from the trip shows young men walking back and forth along the rows of graves, determined to mark as many as possible with flowers. I also remember an attempt by some of the party to defect from our tour and join a scholarly battlefields lecture group. They were willing to forgo a visit to the ancient ruins of Troy in order to learn more about this place that had awakened their sympathies and historical interest.

Our 'Top Deck' tour to Turkey had not been billed as a pilgrimage. The audience at Parit Sulong was probably more united in mood and purpose than the visitors that descend on the Gallipoli peninsula each April. The early pilgrimages of grieving relatives and former soldiers returning to the Gallipoli battlefields after World War I contrast with the televised spectacles of recent decades. Today's crowds include descendants of Anzacs, military

historians, tourists and school groups, with young backpackers regularly a prominent presence.

The range of participants drawn to Anzac Day services both in Australia and overseas demonstrates the current reach of the Anzac tradition. Politicians of various persuasions have appealed to the Anzac legend, and historians and activists have examined and challenged it. Ken Inglis has charted Australians' observance of Anzac Day, remarking on the turn of events in 1990 when 'thousands of young people with backpacks contributed to the largest gathering at Anzac Cove since 1915'.<sup>15</sup> He attributes the 'resurgence' of the Anzac tradition partly to the time

that had elapsed since Australia's involvement in an overseas war, allowing young people to approach commemoration 'in a frame of mind not available to earlier generations'.<sup>16</sup> Since 1990, Australian forces have again embarked overseas and Ken Inglis has listened to government and military leaders draw a 'line from Anzac Cove to Iraq'.<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Lake, among others, has questioned the equation of manhood with nationhood implicit in the Anzac narrative of the birth of the Australian nation at Gallipoli. She recently argued that the Anzac myth, with government backing, 'looms larger than ever in Australian historical memory', overshadowing other significant aspects of our country's history and character.<sup>18</sup>

While large numbers of Australians continue to

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The ceremonies,  
the landscape,  
the numerous graves  
and the youth of the  
dead impress people  
of all ages.

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Several generations of the 2/29th Battalion 'family' marching on Anzac Day, 2008. The experience of the pilgrimage to Parit Sulong encouraged greater involvement of younger members in the Battalion Association and its activities. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY COLIN HARVEY

recognise the national status of Anzac Day and flock to commemorative events, the meanings they find there do not neatly align with political rhetoric, academic argument or media stereotype. Young Australians abroad lay claim to Gallipoli as a travel destination and treat Anzac Day as a date to gather with people from home. The rowdy behaviour of some young travellers in Turkey exhibits an unreflecting celebration of Australia. However, accounts from the participants themselves suggest that many are also moved by their experiences.<sup>19</sup> Bruce Scates points out that the distinctions between travel, tourism and pilgrimage are often not clear.<sup>20</sup> While Anzac Day is a social stop on the backpackers' circuit, young Australians and New Zealanders are often eager to find ancestors' graves and explore the terrain and the history of the peninsula. The ceremonies, the landscape, the numerous graves and the youth of the dead impress people of all ages. Like those who tour the vast cemeteries of France and Belgium, visitors to the Gallipoli peninsula are likely to depart better informed about the battles of World War I and their human cost. As my own recollections suggest, the responses can be surprising.

A battlefields tour can provide insights beyond the wartime history of one battalion or even one nation. During our 2007 tour, museum displays and our guides' commentaries drew our attention to the histories of the countries we visited and their experiences under Japanese occupation. Many ex-servicemen retained strong memories of instances of kindness and courage shown by local people who helped them in the

Malayan jungles and in captivity. As an expression of gratitude, members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division AIF – including ex-servicemen of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion – later supported scholarships for the training of nurses from Malaysia and Singapore in Australia. Tours of the Gallipoli peninsula include visits to Turkish memorials as well as monuments to the Australians, New Zealanders, British, Indians, French and others who fought and died there. Friendliness now characterises interactions between descendants of the Turkish soldiers and the troops who landed on their shores in 1915.

The closest we came to visiting a Japanese memorial in 2007 was a short stop at a steep hill in the Bukit Batok area of Singapore. A monument to the Japanese war dead was built here with prisoner-of-war labour in 1942. The Japanese allowed the prisoners to construct their own memorial behind the Japanese one. Sadly, both monuments were destroyed at the end of the war. A plaque at the foot of the hill now tells the history of the site. Relations between Australians and their former enemies the Japanese are not always easy or relaxed. On the contrary, many ex-servicemen harboured a distrust of the Japanese, and sometimes bitterness was transmitted through generations. Doug Ogden recalls that his first visit to Thailand led him to examine a long-held hatred when he saw two Japanese young people on the station platform at Kanchanaburi:

I was going to hit one of them. I really was going to clock one. And the anger was welling up and I'm clenching my fist I'm going to hit him. And then something said,



The Parit Sulong memorial, showing the inscription in English and Malay. OFFICE OF AUSTRALIAN WAR GRAVES

'Stop. He wasn't even born.' So I walked away. But it stayed with me nearly 60 years.<sup>21</sup>

Doug's account shows that the stories of World War II are part of a continuing history. Bereaved families experienced an enduring grief. Some children never got to know their fathers. Returned servicemen and women had to negotiate homecomings and adjust to domestic and working life in a changing world. Many raised families and became active members of their communities, while coping with injuries, illness and debilitation. Some were reluctant to discuss details of their wartime experiences for many decades, except perhaps at reunions. These days, World War II veterans are in regular demand for interviews. They share memories of their ordeals as soldiers and comment on the influence of the war in their lives. Historians have also begun to interview families of soldiers. Janette Bomford has explored the difficulties faced by former prisoners of war and their families after World War II, noting the long-term health effects of the years of captivity. However, she also points out that many returned men, often with the support of loved ones, managed to readjust and 'relished life'.<sup>22</sup> Our pilgrimage provided an opportunity for members of our group to recall and compare our own experiences as relatives of soldiers and prisoners of war. During our pilgrimage and afterwards, our group reflected on

our family memories, our shared history and our own continuing life journeys.

Even if we wear our fathers' medals, we cannot walk in their shoes. However, we can reach a closer appreciation of their experiences and values. We can also begin to see how our world has been shaped by the lives of servicemen and women and the gaps left by those who did not return. Like many pilgrims before us, our group found personal enrichment, friendship and a sense of history in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. We returned home 'exhausted but renewed by the experience'<sup>23</sup> to continue our lives, reflect and remember.

If we wish to understand our wartime history and its legacies, we ought not forget.

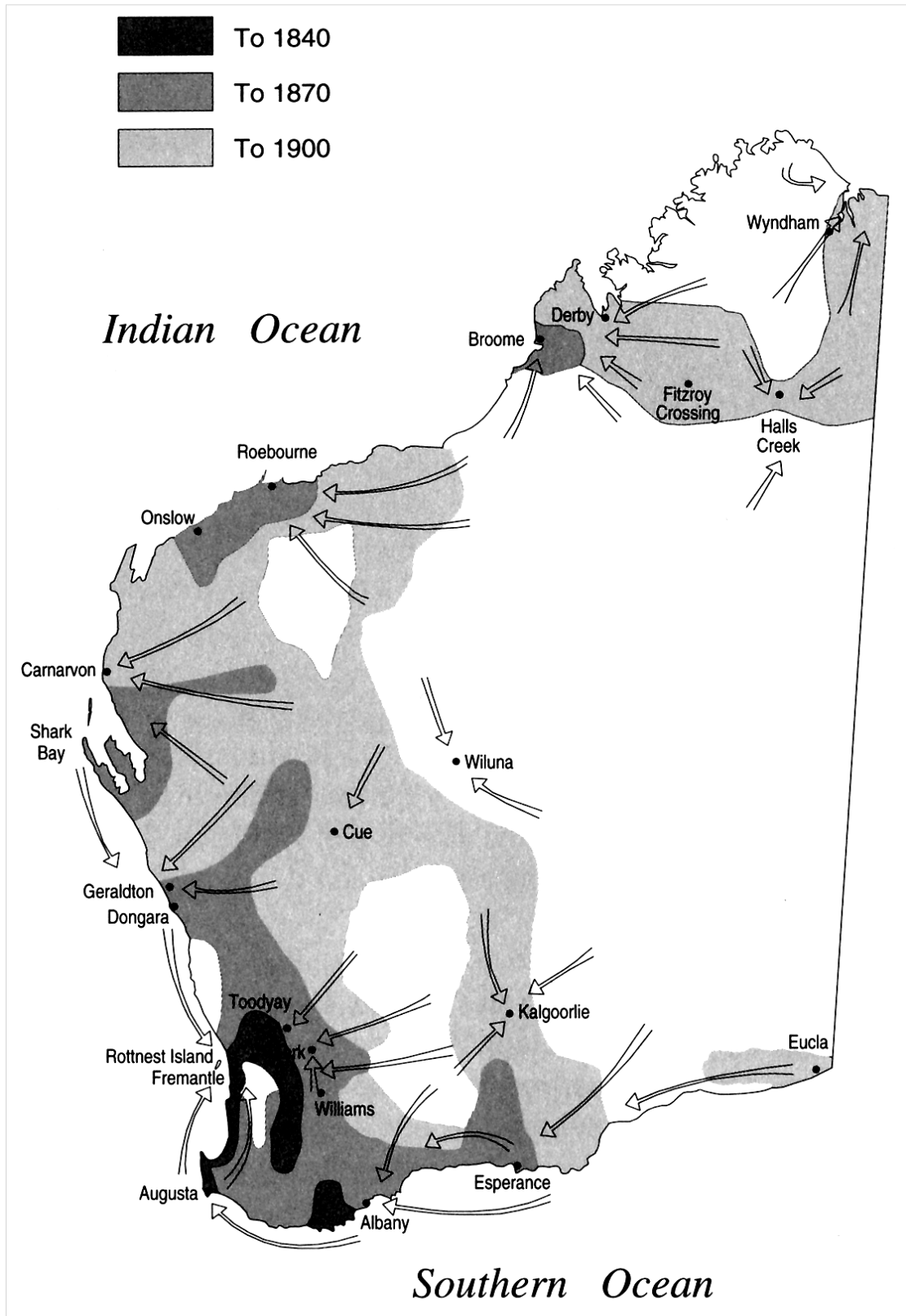
## Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge Doug Ogden for organising the pilgrimage to Parit Sulong in 2007, my father Donald McRae in whose memory I made the journey, and my 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion 'family' for their continuing inspiration. Many people have commented on drafts and offered encouragement, including Margaret Buchanan, Bob Christie, Janella Christie, John Lack, Beth McRae and Doug Ogden. I am particularly grateful for the support of my partner, the late Leigh Swancott, who read every draft and without whom this article would not be as finely tuned.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust, Australia in the War of 1939–1945*, Series 1, Army, vol. 4, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957, p. 246.
- <sup>2</sup> Lynette Ramsay Silver, *The Bridge at Parit Sulong: an investigation of mass murder, Malaya 1942*, Watermark Press, Balmain, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Lynette Ramsay Silver website, <<http://www.lynettesilver.com>>, accessed 6 November 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> John Lack and Peter Hosford (eds), *No Lost Battalion: an oral history of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF*, Slouch Hat Publications, Rosebud, 2005; R.W. Christie and Robert Christie (eds), *A History of the 2/29 Battalion – 8<sup>th</sup> Australian Division AIF*, 2/29 Battalion AIF Association, 1983.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Hamond, *A Fearful Freedom: the story of one man's survival behind the lines in Japanese occupied Malaya 1942–45*, Leo Cooper in association with Secker & Warburg, London, 1984.
- <sup>6</sup> Gary Simmons, *Tough & True: a story of the 2/29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Division AIF, through the eyes of a son*, Gary Simmons, East Doncaster, 2008, p. 208.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 229, 239.
- <sup>8</sup> Email from Doug Ogden, 6 August 2007.
- <sup>9</sup> Greg Denning, *Performances*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1996, p. 232.
- <sup>10</sup> Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: walking the battlefields of the Great War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 101.

- <sup>11</sup> Peter Stanley, *A Stout Pair of Boots: a guide to exploring Australia's battlefields*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008, p. 217.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Lack and Hosford, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
- <sup>14</sup> Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Kenneth Inglis, assisted by Jan Brazier, *Sacred Places: war memorials in the Australian landscape*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2008, p. 418.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 412–413.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 568.
- <sup>18</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'We must fight free of Anzac, lest we forget our other stories', *The Age*, 23 April 2009, p. 17.
- <sup>19</sup> Scates, *op. cit.*, ch. 8.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, see for example pp. xix, 212, 214.
- <sup>21</sup> Transcript of Australian Broadcasting Corporation '7.30 Report', broadcast 25 April 2007, <<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1906568.htm>>, accessed 6 November 2009.
- <sup>22</sup> Janette Bomford, 'A wife, a baby, a home and a new Holden car': family life after captivity', in Martin Crotty (ed.), *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 conference proceedings*, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 2009, p. 201. Available online: <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=725636153236710;res=IELHSS>>, accessed 6 November 2009.
- <sup>23</sup> Scates, *op. cit.*, p. xix.



Frontiers of settlement in Western Australia in the nineteenth century, showing the main towns to which Aboriginals were brought for trial before being transferred to Rottnest Island. Based on a map in the *Western Australian Atlas of Human Endeavour*, 2nd edn, 1986, p. 44. COURTESY NEVILLE GREEN AND SUSAN MOON, *FAR FROM HOME*, P. 13

# ROTTNEST ISLAND AND ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

Neville Green

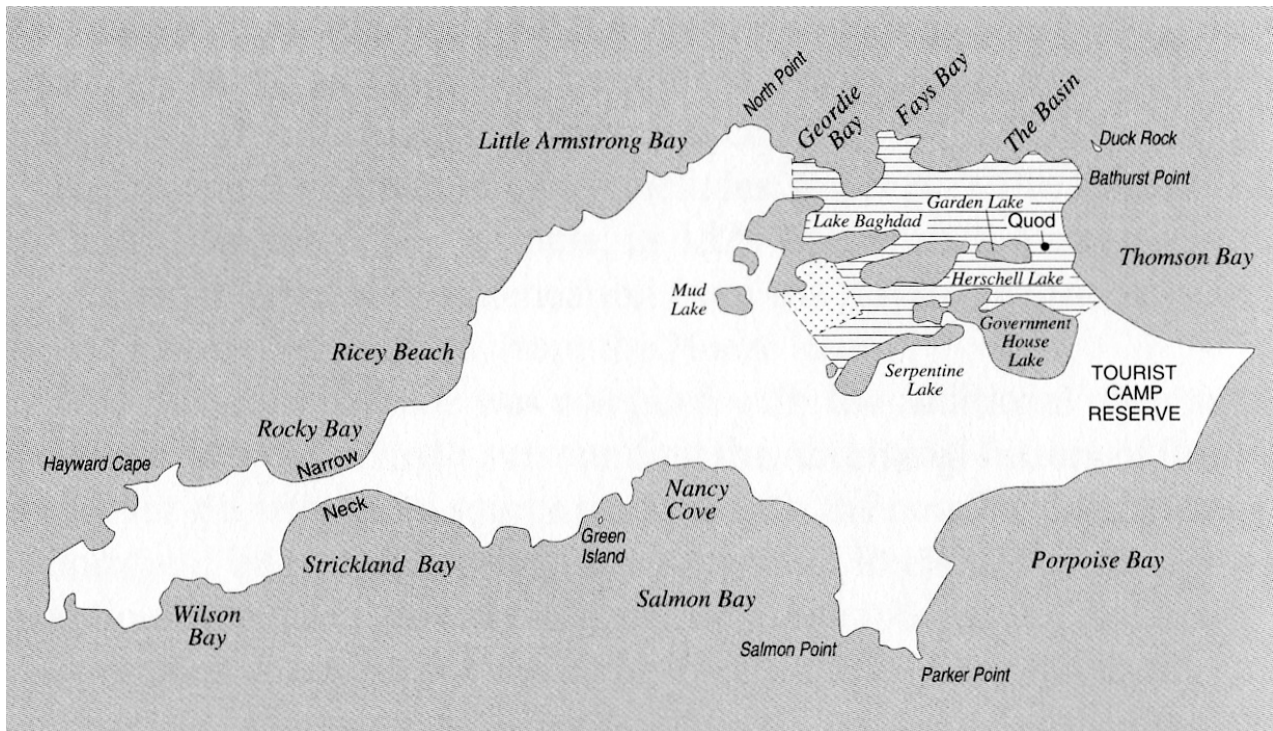
Rottnest Island, off the coast from Fremantle in Western Australia, attracts more than half a million tourists and holidaymakers annually, but very few know that in the 19th century it was an island prison where thousands of Indigenous men served their sentences, where prisoners were executed in what is now tourist accommodation and where, in the shade cast by a grove of trees, hundreds of men lie in unmarked graves.

This article traces the origins of the prison and its shift from a model self-supporting institution, intended to train and rehabilitate Aboriginal offenders, to a prison for men removed from the frontiers of settlement. The segregated Aboriginal prison closed in 1902 and the island's grim history was almost forgotten. On 25 February 2009, the Rottnest Island Authority launched a three-year Indigenous reconciliation plan to acknowledge the many prisoners from all parts of Western Australia who lived, worked and died on the island. This article is written for them.

## Introduction

On 25 February 2009 the Rottnest Island Authority launched a three-year Indigenous reconciliation plan for the former prison island. Rottnest Island sits twenty kilometres off the coast of Western Australia, attracting almost half a million tourists each year. A living heritage museum, it is the ideal location for a reconciliation experiment. This article outlines the prison history of the island and touches upon the interdisciplinary research that provided supporting evidence for the reconciliation plan.

The Rottnest Island Authority vision for reconciliation recognises 'the cultural significance and sad history that Rottnest holds for Aboriginal people', and commits to promoting education and public awareness to build relationships and 'develop respect and create opportunities for Aboriginal people'.<sup>1</sup> The actual plan addresses four major themes, each having Aboriginal participation and consultation: relationships, respect, opportunities, and tracking and reporting.



Rottnest Island c. 1919, showing the newly proclaimed 25 hectare penal area for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal prisoners.

COURTESY STATE RECORDS OFFICE OF WA (CSR 1055/1923) AND NEVILLE GREEN AND SUSAN MOON, *FAR FROM HOME*, P.12



## Rottnest Island Aboriginal prison

The original inhabitants, the Nyungar people, knew the island as Wadjemup. It was given the name Rottnest in 1696 when Willem de Vlamingh, the Dutch explorer, mistook the marsupial quokkas for giant rats and thought the island was a rat's nest. On 2 May 1829, Captain Charles Fremantle took formal possession of the unclaimed western third of the Australian continent. One month later the first British settlers arrived at the Swan River and took up large grants of land.

Stock spearing, damage to property, and the violent and often fatal internecine disputes amongst the Swan River Nyungar Aborigines<sup>2</sup> were of concern to Governor Sir James Stirling; in 1838 the removal of Aboriginal offenders to Rottnest Island was considered to be more humane than incarceration in the existing prisons at Perth and Fremantle. John Hutt, who succeeded Stirling in 1839, was influenced by the humanitarian model<sup>3</sup> of assimilating the Indigenous populations into colonial societies and stated in a letter to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Stanley:

It is further extremely desirable, if these people are to survive our taking possession of their country, that there should be no material boundary-line or demarcation dividing us and them, as to the actual ground we reside on, from each other. If the Aborigines and the colonists are destined to occupy this land in common as British subjects, they ought to be encouraged to mingle together as one people.<sup>4</sup>

During his seven years as governor, Hutt endorsed Native Schools at Perth, Fremantle and Guildford; offered rewards to those settlers who trained Aboriginal men and women in a form of apprenticeship; and in 1841, with the approval of the British Colonial Office, introduced *An Act to Constitute the Island of Rottnest a Legal Prison*. All freehold settler grants on the island were resumed for a prison that Hutt believed would become a self-supporting institution where Aboriginal offenders, some as young as eight years old, would be taught trade and farming skills and then be drawn into the colonial workforce as useful servants.

Under Henry Vincent, the senior warder, the prisoners quarried local stone for the construction of buildings that are still standing and in use. They collected salt from the small lakes on the island for sale in Perth and Fremantle, and salt production was eventually measured in tons per year. In 1842, ten hectares of land were cleared for farming. The prisoners harvested six hectares under wheat and the surplus of quality grain

was sold in Fremantle. That same year Henry Trigg, the Superintendent of Public Works, engaged prisoners in the construction the colony's first lighthouse on a high point of the island.

Few of the prisoners served their full term before being released and the success of Hutt's plan could be seen in Aboriginal employment. A total of 514 Aborigines were employed in the colony in 1848: a ratio of one employee to every eight settlers.<sup>5</sup>

Two years after Hutt's departure in 1846 the acting Governor, Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Irwin, assigned the prisoners to road construction gangs on the mainland. The island prison was closed until 1855, when Governor Arthur Kennedy reopened it to keep Aboriginal prisoners apart, both from colonial prisoners and from the 10,000 British male convicts accepted by Western Australia between 1850 and 1868.

The men sent to Rottnest after 1855 mirrored the encroaching frontiers of pastoral settlement in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Murchison, Southwest and Eastern Goldfields districts. The noted anthropologist, Professor Ron Berndt, estimated that in 1829, Western Australia had at least 90 socio-cultural entities speaking different languages or dialects.<sup>6</sup> Men from many of these groups met on Rottnest; about 365 are buried there.

The first Nyungar prisoners arriving from the cooler southern districts wore kangaroo skin cloaks that were soon exchanged for shirts, hats and trousers. Consider, however, the plight of a man from the warmer northern districts, naked but for a loincloth, packed below decks, unloaded at the long jetty at Fremantle and confined in the small Round House prison at the end of the main street until sea conditions permitted a safe crossing to Rottnest.

Upon arrival on the island, the prisoner's name, home locality, crime and sentence were recorded in the admissions register and later, the date of his discharge or death was added. He was issued with prison garb, and a numbered identity disc was tied to a cord to be worn around his neck. Afterwards he was escorted to a cell with a floor area of six square metres that he shared with three or four others, each having a sleeping space of about 60 centimetres in width.

Six days of every week, gangs of prisoners worked under unarmed warders, gathering salt, quarrying stone for retaining walls and huts, ploughing, seeding, harvesting and undertaking other general duties around the settlement. On Sundays they were permitted to use spears and fishing lines and roam the island at will, on the condition that they return to the prison when the bell was rung late in the afternoon. Fire-stick hunting was forbidden.

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Despite the cultural diversity of the prison population and the range of hunting and gathering techniques used in their home territories, we do not know how this knowledge was applied at Rottnest. The only written records of the prisoners' leisure activities are in the unpublished notes of L.C. Timperley, the son of Superintendent W.H. Timperley, and in the letters Lady Mary Anne Barker wrote to her son, Guy.<sup>7</sup>

The reconciliation process recognises both the pre and the post-colonial Indigenous associations with the island. Rising sea levels, commencing about 20,000 years before the present era (BP), converted hilltops into islands. Determining whether Aboriginal contact with Rottnest Island was continuous or broken was a question settled by archaeologists. Charles Dortch and Kate Morse agreed that two stone flakes found on the island were artefacts that pre-date the separation of the island from the mainland, which rising sea-levels completed about 12,000 BP.<sup>8</sup> No post-separation stone artefacts have been found and, given that the Nyungar people did not use any form of water-craft and the twenty kilometres was too great to swim, continuous possession is unproven.<sup>9</sup>

More recent artefacts dating to the prison era were found in shaded locations where men, relaxing on a hillside within hearing of the afternoon recall bell, transformed pieces of bottle glass into exquisite spearheads. The spearheads disappeared into private collections but the scattered glass flakes found at such sites result from a pressure flaking technique unknown to the southern Nyungar men. Anthropologists have established that the craftsmen were from the Kimberley.<sup>10</sup>

Corroborees were infrequent in the early years of the prison, but tolerated during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. From the two surviving descriptions below, these events are shown to be times of cultural exchange when prisoners could briefly forget the cells and step forward as law men, respected by their fellow prisoners. Lady Barker describes one occasion, c.1885:

A couple of large brushwood fires were lighted in the centre of the big courtyard, and a few natives stood by to feed the flames. The dancers supplied the music themselves, and the most curious part of the performance was the way they all gave the grunt or 'wuff' exactly in unison. Every movement of the one hundred and twenty performers was made absolutely and entirely together, like one man, and the grunt which guided them were equally exact in time. It was a weird and striking scene.<sup>11</sup>

Another description comes from the son of Superintendent Timperley (1883–1890), who recalls that singing was permitted every night before the prisoners were counted into their cells and sometimes became a competition between men of different districts and different languages. Corroborees were conducted only on weekend evenings:

When a big corroboree was to be staged, it was possible to see as many different varieties of corroborees as there were tribes in the prison. Those taking part painted various designs on their bodies with lime, manufactured spider web head-dresses from rushes, sticks and the woollen bindings from their blankets and carried sticks which had been scraped into balls of shavings ... On these occasions, small fires were lit in the gaol courtyard and round these the natives corroboreed to the accompaniment of a vocal orchestra, which clattered kylies [boomerangs] in perfect time and supplied other effects. The rhythmical stamping of the natives' feet on the bolder forms of corroboree could be heard all over the settlement.<sup>12</sup>

The settlers – whose concept of prison was a place of punishment – could not be reconciled to convicted felons having the freedom to hunt, fish and dance at corroborees, and considered Rottnest to be a soft option. There was, however, the less obvious



Left: The original entrance to the Rottnest Island prison. Right: The quod interior and cells that now accommodate tourists.

PHOTOGRAPHS: NEVILLE GREEN

punishment of separation from family and country. Adam Oliver, a chief warder at Rottnest, told the Forrest Inquiry<sup>13</sup> of the despair of traditional Aboriginal prisoners, 'The natives all long for their own country and pine very much to return. They are very pleased when they get their liberty.'<sup>14</sup> Henry Trigg also observed this despair:

The prisoners will sit down and weep most bitterly, particularly the old men, or those who have left wives and children on the main; and when they see the smoke from the fires at the place where they have been accustomed to meet when unshackled and free, memory wanders over the scenes of bye-gone days, they seemed sensitively alive to their lost freedom and lamentably bewail their captivity.<sup>15</sup>

Epidemics of measles and influenza swept through the settled regions of the colony in 1883 and Rottnest was not exempt. As the deaths in custody steadily increased, Governor Frederick Napier Broome commissioned Surveyor General, John Forrest, to investigate and report on the prisoners and their conditions.<sup>16</sup> The transcripts of several prisoner interviews, published with Forrest's report, are an important aspect of the reconciliation process because we hear, from their voices, how they responded to the life on Rottnest.

Brandy from Eucla said:

I have been here some time. I do not like Rottnest. Too many kill'em. Too many make'em ill. I came here for killing a sheep. I saw the sheep had strayed and my woman said to me, 'kill it,' and I did so. I am cold here in winter. At night it is cold. I have a good blanket now, but I had a very bad one before, all the winter. I get plenty to eat.<sup>17</sup>

Bob Thomas was born at Kojonup in the south:

I can read a little. I have been two years on the island. I was here for twelve months before, about five years ago. I do not like Rottnest because I am not the same as if I was in my own country. If I was out I would be my own master.<sup>18</sup>

Widgie Widgie Johnnie said:

I belong to Ethacootharra or Pyramid Station in the North District [Pilbara]. I am here for killing a native. I do not like Rottnest, it makes me ill. I have been

two winters here. I came in the steamer. I had a chain around my neck all the way down. I was all right when I was in my own country. I used to be a pearl diver, but latterly a shepherd.<sup>19</sup>

Sambo, from Gulleway in the lower Murchison, was serving a life sentence for a tribal murder:

I do not like Rottnest because it is a bad place. I do not like it because I might get bad and die. I have not been ill here. I am very cold in winter. I have not enough clothes. At night it is very cold. My blanket is old and thin.<sup>20</sup>

Charlie Yathee, from the lower Gascoyne, found a smoker's pipe and handed it to a police assistant. He was then arrested and charged with being in the possession of stolen goods and sent to Rottnest for three years:

I do not like Rottnest. I am sick of it ... I came in the steamer from Gascoyne [Carnarvon], and had a chain around my neck all the way to Champion Bay [Geraldton] when it was taken off ... I sleep in a cell with three others ... I have been a pearl diver and horse rider ... I work in the garden with several others.<sup>21</sup>

The process of reconciliation requires some knowledge of what happened to men such as these. Brandy was paroled as a guide to a Kimberley survey party and disappeared while searching for a missing horse. Sambo died of influenza at Rottnest on 26 June 1886. Benjamin returned to his home country and in 1893, while fishing with friends, he was swept into the ocean and drowned. Yathee was paroled as a police assistant in the southern town of Mandurah. Of Widgie Widgie Johnnie and Bob Thomas there are no further records.

Reconciliation draws the past into the present, to understand it rather than to condemn. In a vast country such as Australia, distance is sometimes taken for granted. Between arrest and trial, a man might walk incredible distances on a neck chain linked to a policeman's saddle. Benjamin from Eyres Sand Patch, which is almost 500 kilometres to the east of Esperance, said that he was naked when he was arrested and chained; he then walked with his mounted police escort to Albany, more than 800 kilometres, and continued the journey to Fremantle by ship. At Albany he was given a blanket and the clothes he was still wearing when interviewed by Forrest.<sup>22</sup>

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estimated 365 are buried in unmarked graves. Five men were executed. Superintendent Jackson described how he prepared the 140 prisoners assembled to witness the 1883 executions of Wangabiddie and Guerilla:

I went along the whole of prisoners explaining to them why these two men were to be hanged; the prisoners listened with great silence and during the time of the execution remained seriously attentive and immovable. The two executions were performed in a most expeditive manner, death taking place instantaneously.<sup>23</sup>

The bodies were taken down and buried by their countrymen in unmarked graves.

Historians Howard Pedersen in 1987<sup>24</sup>, and Trevor Tann and Ken Winder in 1989, identified most of the prisoners who died in custody<sup>25</sup>; however the first comprehensive study by Neville Green and Susan Moon brought to light more names, origins, crimes where known, and the details of executions and more deaths<sup>26</sup>. This has contributed significantly to the reconciliation plan, and lends support to any future proposals for a memorial dedicated to these men, who came from all parts of Western Australia, and who never returned to their homelands.

With the establishment of Aboriginal prisons at Roebourne in the Pilbara and Wyndham in the East

Kimberley, the cost of escorting prisoners south could not be justified and the Rottneest Aboriginal prison closed in 1902. The government of the day, while recognising the tourist potential of the island, retained a portion as a penal outstation for a small number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal prisoners, rarely more than twenty, who repaired the holiday cottages, collected firewood and maintained the pathways and roads for tourists.<sup>27</sup> These men were eventually accommodated at a salt works prison separated from the tourist settlement by a salt lake. An earthen causeway laid across the lake in about 1845 was still in use in 2009.

The Rottneest Island Board was formed in 1917 and, with tourism booming, the cells of the 1864 prison (known as the Quod) were modified to accommodate tourists. Cottages were also built and the popular tent land established in an area that is now believed to be an Aboriginal cemetery. Although historians have identified the names of the dead<sup>28</sup> the exact location of the burial ground is elusive. Rottneest has a small, walled cemetery with a few engraved headstones of settlers and others, but somewhere near the settlement there are possibly two unmapped Aboriginal graveyards. In his annual report for 1884, Superintendent W.H. Timperley referred to a new cemetery some little distance from the Quod that was yet to receive a body.<sup>29</sup> The cemetery that was in use from 1840 to 1884 would have held about 270 bodies, and the 'new' cemetery, if it was ever used,



Nyungar dancers at the launch of the reconciliation plan in 2009. PHOTOGRAPH: NEVILLE GREEN

would have held about 95 bodies, including that of Billy Shaw of Toodyay, who died on 22 June 1906 and was the last person to be buried on the island.

The road to Aboriginal reconciliation began in 1972 when workmen digging a sewerage trench unearthed several human skeletons.<sup>30</sup> There was very little Indigenous response to this discovery; however in 1988 a press report, that an Alan Bond company was excavating the prison yard for a swimming pool, drew more than 200 Indigenous men and women from all parts of Western Australia to Rottnest.<sup>31</sup> Their united protest resulted in the restoration of the site, and set in train twenty years of research and negotiation to recognise the unique role that Rottnest Island has in modern Aboriginal history.

Preliminary interviews by anthropologist Peter Randolph and a series of ground-probing radar surveys by Curtin University<sup>32</sup> have established the probable boundaries of the cemetery. This area, now cleared of tents and cottages, is recognised as a memorial park and its development is incorporated into the reconciliation plan. It is one of the sites included on the Aboriginal heritage sites register.

The nineteenth century buildings on the island are heritage listed and those with an Indigenous association are unique. All, with the exception of the boys' reformatory, used Aboriginal prisoners to quarry

and carry the stone used in the construction.<sup>33</sup> The governor's summer holiday retreat – completed in 1864 and used as a temporary prison in 1915 – is now the Rottnest Hotel, known colloquially as The Quokka Arms. Some of the island's buildings have been in continuous use since 1842; collectively, they form the oldest assemblage of buildings in Australia established with Aboriginal labour. Excellent studies, by architect R.J. Ferguson<sup>34</sup> and interpretation consultant Kylie Winkworth<sup>35</sup>, have identified and dated all the buildings on the island and their use over time, and have validated the Indigenous links that were identified by historians, anthropologists and archaeologists.

### Conclusion

The reconciliation plan may well have stalled at the first barrier without the multidisciplinary approach to complex research, combined with the support and co-operation of the Indigenous community, that has made it a model of Aboriginal reconciliation. Key Indigenous participants included: Karen Jacobs, a member of the Rottnest Island Authority; Dr Richard Walley OAM; Len Collard, Chair of Indigenous Studies Murdoch University; Marilyn Morgan, then Project Manager of Aboriginal Economic Development; and anthropologist Kado Muir. Invited Indigenous guests from the Murchison, Southwest and Kimberley –



Speakers at the launch of the Rottnest Island reconciliation plan: Dr Liz Constable, Minister for Tourism; Dr Kim Hames, Minister for Indigenous Affairs; and The Honourable Fred Chaney of Reconciliation Australia. PHOTOGRAPH: NEVILLE GREEN

including Mark Bin Baker, Indigenous Australian of the Year and West Australian of the Year 2008 – witnessed the formal presentation of the reconciliation plan on 25 February 2009. The plan was endorsed by: Mr Cedric Jacobs, a Swan River elder; Dr Liz Constable, the Minister for Tourism; Dr Kim Hames, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs; and The Honourable Fred Chaney,

Director of Reconciliation Australia. The ceremony was followed by the launch of the Wadjemup Bus Tours, managed by a Nyungar team under the direction of Noel and Greg Nannup. Now, after many years of negotiation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ambitions have merged and the historical, cultural and economic interests of Rottnest Island are well served.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Reconciliation Action Plan 2008–2011*, Rottnest Island Authority, February 2009, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> Nyungar, and its variants including Noongah and Noongar, is the term acknowledged by the traditional owners of an area west of a line drawn diagonally from Jurien Bay on the west coast to Bremer Bay on the south coast. This territory is divided into fourteen sub-groups with the Perth metropolitan area claimed as Whadjuck territory.
- <sup>3</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, British House of Commons, *British Parliamentary Papers, 1837* (425), vol. VII. Governor John Hutt in a dispatch to the Marquis of Normanby, 11 February 1840, referred to this report, 'I have taken as my guide the suggestions contained in the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Aboriginal tribes; whilst I have at the same time had the advantage of the local experience which my residence among this singular race has afforded me.'
- <sup>4</sup> Hutt to Lord Stanley, 8 April 1842, *Aborigines Australian Colonies 1844*, p. 411. This was originally proposed by an Oxford University professor, Herman Merivale, in *Lectures on Colonisation and Colonies 1839–1841*, Oxford University Press, London, 1928, pp. 386 and 377. Merivale reduced the prospects for Indigenous people of the British colonies to three: their mass removal to reserves, gradual genocide or, his preferred option, amalgamation into colonial society. He was Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office 1847–1860. The years 1835–1850 represent a short term of Colonial Office reform and experiment referred to as the humanitarian period.
- <sup>5</sup> *Western Australian Year Book*, 1902, WA nineteenth century census data (1901). However, the work was both seasonal and menial and, with the arrival in June 1850 of the first of almost 10,000 Crown convicts, the need for Aboriginal labour in the south of the colony diminished.
- <sup>6</sup> Ronald Berndt, 'The First Australians' in *Western Australia: an Atlas of Human Endeavour*, Education and Lands and Surveys Departments, Perth, 1979, p. 33.
- <sup>7</sup> Lady Mary Anne Barker, the widow of General Barker, retained her title when she married Frederick N. Broome in 1865.
- <sup>8</sup> Charles Dortch and Kate Morse, 'Prehistoric stone artefacts on some off-shore islands in Western Australia', in *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 19, 1984, pp. 39–40.
- <sup>9</sup> Neville Green and Susan Moon (eds), *Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838–1931*, Dictionary of Western Australians, vol. X, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1997. Green and Moon, pp. 72–78, discuss the escapes from the island using stolen dinghies. They found no evidence to support Nyungar folk-lore that prisoners swam to the mainland. Given the primitive swim techniques known to world cultures in the nineteenth century, it would be a huge challenge and impossible for those limited to a 'dog paddle' and lacking a flotation aid.
- <sup>10</sup> P.E. Serventy, 'Aboriginal artefacts at Rottnest Island', *The Western Australian Naturalist*, vol. 10, no. 6, 1957, pp. 123–124.
- <sup>11</sup> Alexandra Hasluck (ed.), *Remembered with Affection: a new edition of the letters to Guy by Lady Barker*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963, p. 113.
- <sup>12</sup> L.C. Timperley, 'Notes by L.C. Timperley, Rottnest Island c. 1883 when his father was superintendent of the Aboriginal prison', unpublished manuscript, Battye Library, Acc 788A.
- <sup>13</sup> Governor Frederick Broome appointed the Surveyor General, Sir John Forrest, to chair an inquiry into the treatment of Aboriginal native prisoners in 1883.
- <sup>14</sup> John Forrest, *Report of a Commission to Inquire into the Treatment of Aboriginal Native Prisoners of the Crown in this Colony*, Legislative Council, Perth, 1884, Paper No. 32, statement by Adam Oliver, p. 11.
- <sup>15</sup> *Government Gazette*, 11 February 1842, Henry Trigg's report.
- <sup>16</sup> John Forrest, op. cit.; Green and Moon, op. cit., p. 59, table 4 places the 1883 death toll at 62 but it could be more because the records for that year are incomplete.
- <sup>17</sup> John Forrest, op. cit., statement by Brandy, p. 13.
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, statement by Bob Thomas, p. 12.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, statement by Widgie Widgie Johnnie, p. 12.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, statement by Sambo, p. 13.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, statement by Charlie Yathee, p. 12.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, statement by Benjamin, p. 13.
- <sup>23</sup> SROWA: CSR 1493/1883, vol. 2, Jackson to Colonial Secretary, 19 June 1883.
- <sup>24</sup> Howard Pedersen, 'Aboriginal men who died at Rottnest Island 1838–1900' seen by the author in 1990 at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Library, Perth, but no details were taken.
- <sup>25</sup> Ken G. Winder and Trevor Tann, untitled report by Rottnest Island Consultancy, 1989, 010/90, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Perth.
- <sup>26</sup> Green and Moon, op. cit.
- <sup>27</sup> Neville Green, 'World War I Internees on Rottnest Island' (unpublished), Grant-in-aid project, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1993. In 1915, tourists were excluded when about 1,200 Germans and aliens from the Austro-Hungarian Empire were interned on Rottnest before being transferred to the Liverpool internment camp in New South Wales.
- <sup>28</sup> Green and Moon, op. cit., pp. 64–67.
- <sup>29</sup> Rottnest Island Report for 1884, *Western Australian Votes and Proceedings 1885*, p. 4.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Island's ugly past' and 'The day they dug up Rottnest's secret', interview with Ernie Shardlow, *West Australian*, 17 October 1987, p. 15.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Island work ban possible, Hand', *West Australian*, 2 September 1989, p. 14; 'Work to stop on Rottnest Lodge pool', *West Australian*, 29 September 1989, p. 5.
- <sup>32</sup> Peter Randolph, V. Wilson, C. Frampton and G. Merritt, 'Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery', in *Archaeology in the North*, Proceedings of the Australian Archaeological Association Conference, 1993, pp. 394–415.
- <sup>33</sup> The 1879 boys' reformatory may not have employed Aborigines, but during the 1883 influenza and measles epidemics, one boys' dormitory served as an emergency hospital.
- <sup>34</sup> R.J. Ferguson, *Rottnest Island: History and Architecture*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1986.
- <sup>35</sup> Kylie Winkworth, 'Rottnest Island, Western Australia Interpretation Plan', 1997 (unpublished report), Heritage Council Library, Perth, RN 2891, CN 1107WA, 128.02.

# CONTRIBUTORS

Dr **Rachel Buchanan** is the author of *The Parihaka Album: lest we forget* (Huia, 2009) which was launched in New Zealand in February 2010. The book is about her (Maori and Pakeha) family and about how New Zealand remembers and forgets its nineteenth century wars of foundation. Rachel teaches in the media studies program at La Trobe University. She was a reporter on New Zealand daily newspapers in the late 1980s and on staff at *The Age* from 1993 until 2002. She has been a regular contributor to the paper since then.

**Jane Mayo Carolan** was educated in history and library and information resources at the University of Melbourne and at RMIT. After teaching at Deakin University she worked as an archivist assisting other historians. Her commissioned works include obituaries for *The Age* and *The Australian*, articles for *Eureka Street*, the history of a suburban Anglican church, an exploration of the furniture design of Walter Burley Griffin and histories of Trinity Grammar School, Kew and St Leonard's College, Brighton. *No Run-of-the-Mill: a biography of Henry Beaufort Somerset* was published by Australian Scholarly Publishing in 2006. *The Life of an Industrial Scientist: Sir David Zeidler* is due to be published in 2010. Jane is currently writing a centenary company history for Catholic Church Insurances Limited.

**Neville Green**, a member of the Western Australian PHA, specialises in Aboriginal history, education and cultural change. He has a PhD in history from the University of Western Australia and a PhD in education history from Murdoch University. Neville is author, co-author and editor of nine books, and many reports and articles, mostly with Indigenous themes. In 1992 he became a professional historian specialising in native title. This article is one outcome of twelve years' research into Rottneest Island's prison history with his daughter Susan Moon (now Aguiar), published as *Far From Home: Aboriginal prisoners of Rottneest Island 1838–1931*.

**Caitlin Mahar's** interview with Pearlie McNeill and a program she produced on the 'garden suburb' of Daceyville in New South Wales were broadcast as part of Radio National's *Verbatim* series in 2000. Since then, she has juggled stints of freelance research and writing, and a job teaching literature in the Foundation Studies Program at the University of Melbourne. Caitlin recently returned to the University of Melbourne to begin a PhD in history.

**Amanda McLeod** is a freelance writer with a particular interest in social, consumer and commercial issues. She holds a doctorate in history from Monash University and has worked on a wide range of projects. Her first book, *Abundance: mass consumption in postwar Australia*, was published in 2007 and her work has appeared in a wide range of local and international journals including *Business History*, *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, *Living Ethics*, *Grass Roots*, *Melbourne Historical Journal* and *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*. Between 2007 and 2009 Amanda was a Williamson Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne.

**Heather McRae** completed her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in church history and her Master of Arts in Public History in military history; this led to the publication of *Soldier Surveyors: a history of 3 Australian Field Survey Company (AIF) 1940–1945*. Heather has written and co-edited guides to collections of archival records and worked in historical research, archives and records management, including two years with the Public Record Office in Kew, England. She now works as an archivist with the City of Port Phillip in Victoria, managing local government records dating back to the 1850s. Heather is a long-standing member of the Oral History Association of Australia, the Fitzroy History Society and the Professional Historians Association (Vic).

Professor **Robert Pascoe** is Dean Laureate at Victoria University in Melbourne, a title given to him in recognition of his 17 years as the founding Dean of Arts at that university. He is also a Professor of History at the University, researching and teaching in fields as diverse as Australian history, the history of the Middle East, sports history, and general survey courses. In 1995 Robert published *The Winter Game*, still a standard reference for the social history of Australian Rules football. His current football book, co-authored with Mark Pennings, deals with clubs in colonial Victoria. He would welcome comments on this paper, addressed to Robert.Pascoe@vu.edu.au.

Dr **Liz Rushen** initially trained as a teacher, before practising and lecturing in business communications and office management both in Australia and in Europe. After completing a PhD in history at Monash University in 1999, Liz was appointed Executive Director of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. She is a member of the Professional Historians Association and an Adjunct Research Associate in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University. Liz is widely published and is currently working with Perry McIntyre (PHA NSW) on a project that explores the experiences of pre-famine Irish immigrants to Australia, particularly in the context of the wider diaspora of this period.

Dr **Emily Turner-Graham**'s next book, *"Never forget that you are a German": Die Brücke, Deutschtum and National Socialism in interwar Australia*, is the first detailed cultural study of Nazi ideology as it was presented to the interwar Australian public. It will be published by Peter Lang Verlag in 2010. Her research interests include German colonialism, interwar fascisms in Germany, Britain and Australia and contemporary extreme right wing activity in Austria and Germany. Emily has taught widely in German and Australian history. She is currently working on a number of projects including: Rudolf Asmis, the German Consul-General to Australia from 1932–1939; Arnold von Skerst; and Heinz-Christian Strache, current leader of Austria's extreme right party, the FPÖ. She is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Contemporary Europe Research Centre.

Dr **Fay Woodhouse** is a historian with expertise in 19th and 20th century Victorian history, biography and heritage. She is the author of: *Vintage Stories: a 150 year history of Tahbilk*; *Altona Yacht Club: a history of community sailing*; *Still Learning: a 50 year history of Monash University Peninsula Campus*; and *Leslie Latham: a biography*; as well as numerous entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*. Fay contributed the chapter 'Always a part of Carlton life: students' to *Carlton: a history*.





