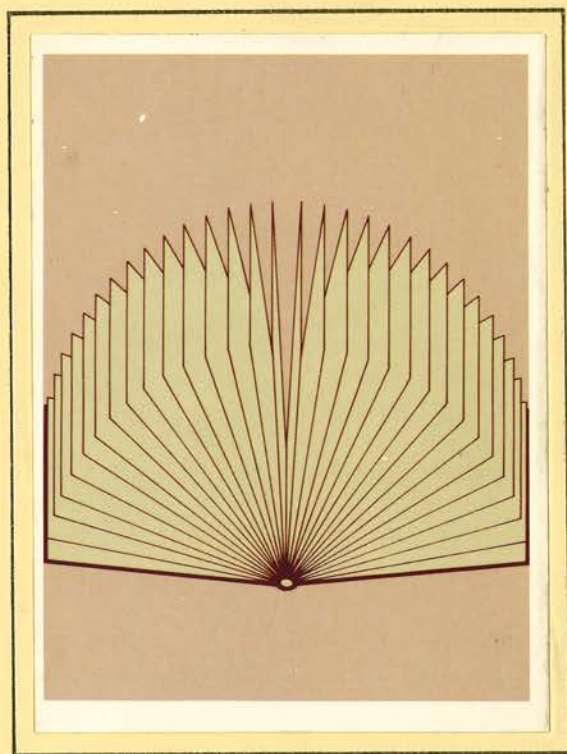


AUSTRALIANS

A GUIDE TO SOURCES





Sir Arthur Streeton, Balmoral Beach, 1897. Oil on canvas. Gift of Howard Hinton. Born in Victoria in 1867, Streeton, a landscape painter, became one of the founders of the Heidelberg School. In 1897 Balmoral, on the northern side of Port Jackson, was a secluded bushland setting.

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A GUIDE TO SOURCES

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AUSTRALIANS: A HISTORICAL LIBRARY
AUSTRALIANS: A GUIDE TO SOURCES

First published 1987 by
Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates
235 Jones Street, Broadway
New South Wales 2007, Australia

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Australians: a historical library
Includes bibliographies and index.
ISBN 0 949288 09 8 (set).
ISBN 0 949288 18 7 (set : deluxe).
ISBN 0 949288 25 X (Australians, a guide to sources).
ISBN 0 949288 26 8 (Australians, a guide to sources : deluxe).

1. Australia – History. I. Title: Australians to 1788.
- II. Title: Australians 1838. III. Title: Australians 1888. IV. Title: Australians 1938. V. Title: Australians from 1939. VI. Title: Australians, a historical atlas.
- VII. Title: Australians, a guide to sources. VIII. Title: Australians, events and places. IX. Title: Australians, a historical dictionary. X. Title: Australians, historical statistics.

994

Typeset and Printed at Griffin Press, Netley, South Australia 5037, Australia.
Film Separations, Colour Scanners Pty Limited, Marrickville, New South Wales 2204, Australia.

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Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates is a partnership between John Fairfax & Sons Limited, David Syme & Co. Limited and Kevin Weldon & Associates Pty Ltd.

Published outside Australia by Cambridge University Press
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP 32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
ISBN 0 521 34073 X (set, Cambridge University Press).

COVER ILLUSTRATION

Design by John Bull.

FOREWORD

THIS BOOK and its ten companions have been ten years in the making. They have been created to mark the bicentenary of European settlement in this country, and they are the outcome of collaboration on a scale never before attempted in the writing of Australian history. Hundreds of people in and beyond universities have joined together to re-create the experience of people living in Australia since 1788 and to place that experience in the wider context of a human occupation that began tens of thousands of years ago.

The editors and contributors have worked in a variety of modes: from slicing into the past at fifty-year intervals (*Australians 1838, 1888 and 1938*) to laying out, in terse chronology, events as they happened year by year (*Events and places*), and from portraying processes and movements on maps of the country (*A historical atlas*) to briefing readers for explorations of their own (*A guide to sources*). The authors represent diverse approaches, in terms both of occupation—historian, economist, archaeologist, geographer, librarian, journalist—and of outlook. We have sought the best person for each part of the job, and not altered or muffled anybody's voice. We have also tried to make the work of scholars readily accessible to general readers.

In this aspiration we have been strengthened by a close working relationship with the publishers. From early days the project has benefited from continuous consultation with representatives of Fairfax, Syme & Weldon about its form and presentation. Their confidence in our enterprise has heartened us throughout the long journey.

Together, we and they present *Australians: a historical library* to the people of Australia as an offering for 1988 and beyond.

OLIVER MACDONAGH

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PREFACE

HISTORIANS are professionally interested in the passing of time, and in 1977 a few historians in Canberra began to think about 1988 as a year offering a special opportunity to their craft. That year, we guessed, would inspire a larger and more general commemoration than Australians had organised at the end of any previous half-century. The coming occasion was sure to be more *national* than those others, for advances in central government, transport and communication had accelerated the transformation of states that had once been separate colonies into provinces of a single polity, whose people travelled about as never before, talked to each other on STD, watched all over the continent the same prime ministerial news conference and the same cricket match. Moreover, Australian history itself was gaining a new popularity, as Stuart Macintyre comments at the end of the first chapter in *Australians: a guide to sources*. The names of Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey were better known than those of any scholarly historian in earlier times; historical and genealogical societies were burgeoning, and tourists flocked to Ballarat to see gold-rush days reconstructed at Sovereign Hill and to Old Sydney Town to see convict floggings re-enacted. Television viewers switched on to Australian costume dramas; and cinema audiences were offered, in 1977 alone, eight feature films based on life in the remote and recent Australian past.

All in all, it appeared likely that public and private enterprise would make 1988 a year for intense consciousness of Australian history. What might historians contribute? Individually, of course, whatever scholarly article or biography or general history an author was moved to attempt. Collectively? The Canberra group, consulting widely, found some antipathy towards the very idea of collaborative enterprise — ‘history by committee’ — and some particular doubts about proposed approaches. But it also found much interest and enthusiasm, and eventually enough support to embark on the project that has become *Australians: a historical library*.

The makers of these books do not see them as official history in any sense. The project has had no money from the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

Money for general administration and for research on different volumes has been provided from universities (especially the Australian National University and the University of New South Wales), and from the Australian Research Grants Scheme. General and volume editors have taken on the job as part of their work in universities and colleges of advanced education. With few exceptions, contributors are also unpaid. Royalties will go into a fund to support Australian studies. Some advance royalties paid years ahead of publication, have been ploughed into research for the books.

That was a source of funds unforeseen when we began. Some potential publishers told us that they would need a subsidy; Fairfax, Syme & Weldon asked for no subsidy, anticipated larger sales than any other publisher we approached, and encouraged us to plan without any inhibitions the size of the books and the quantity and quality of illustrations. The scale on which the publishers have been willing to undertake the project has helped us keep two early resolutions: to write for general readers, addressing them with respect but without assuming prior knowledge and to illustrate the books richly, not for mere decorative effect but to integrate visual material with text.

Historians had long lamented the absence of a set of reference books that would deliver essential information about Australian history to students, authors and browsers. The *Australian encyclopaedia*, first published in 1925 and revised three times since, included much information about Australia's past, but its focus was not primarily historical. Many reference works were devoted to particular subject areas, from A. McCulloch's *Encyclopaedia of Australian art* and E. M. Miller and F. T. Macartney's *Australian literature* to C. A. Hughes and B. D. Graham's *A handbook of Australian government and politics* and the official histories of Australia's part in two world wars.

Taken together, such books made up a valuable reference library. Few people, however, possessed them all; and those who did still found large gaps in their library's historical coverage. The committee planning this project had an impressive precedent in the *Australian dictionary of biography*, a multi-volume enterprise which draws on scholars throughout the nation.

Australians lacked an atlas of their history and a convenient compilation of historical statistics. Information about other aspects of the past was scattered and hard to come by. We decided, therefore, that the series should include five reference volumes, presenting our past in an accessible and inviting format. This is the purpose of *Australians: a historical atlas*, *Australians: events and places*, *Australians: a historical dictionary*, *Australians: a guide to sources* and *Australians: historical statistics*.

These five volumes build on earlier generations of reference works, including encyclopaedias, colonial, state and commonwealth yearbooks, census reports, *Who's who*, the *Australian dictionary of biography* and atlases. Our editors, writers and researchers have also used many books published about aspects of Australian life and unpublished material in libraries, government and private archives and museums. We have drawn on the expertise of the staff of such institutions and of individual researchers across the nation.

Each reference book approaches the past in different ways. *Events and places* combines a chronology and a gazetteer, providing a reference that is both historical and geographical in approach. In the *Events* section we set out what we consider to be the most important and interesting happenings in Australian history. We intend *Events* to have many uses: for example, to settle arguments about who was the first to do what; to help a reader imagine Australia in the year in which he or she was born or when a parent, grandparent or greatgrand-

parent first arrived. The *Places* section provides a summary history of more than seven hundred cities, towns and geographical features. Some of the towns, especially those founded near goldfields, now scarcely exist. There are 32 regional essays in *Places* which put the localities in a wider historical and economic framework.

Australians: a historical dictionary has over 1000 entries on people, movements, ideas and institutions which have shaped Australia's past. Readers will find short biographies on such prominent Australians as Dame Nellie Melba, Jack Lang, Judith Wright and Rupert Murdoch. Historical developments including land settlement schemes and the spread of the railway system are explained, as are terms such as 'peacocking' and 'cabbage tree hat'. Readers can discover information on such diverse topics as the creation of Vegemite and the invention of the combine harvester.

Like every work of reference published, these volumes draw on original sources and the knowledge of researchers and specialists. Often original sources that might confirm a detail no longer survive, and often those that do survive cannot be relied on. There will be experts on particular topics, localities and events who will dispute our knowledge, unearth new facts and disprove old ones. We are keen to receive such information for additions or corrections to future printings.

Together, these five books provide the most extensive reference library ever produced on Australian history.

PETER SPEARRITT

INTRODUCTION

TO UNDERSTAND contemporary Australia we must know our yesterdays, and it is the purpose of this volume to make the basis for the study of our yesterdays readily accessible, primarily by means of an extensive reading list on selected topics which form between them a conspectus of studies related to Australia, and secondarily by setting out our location of resources available to those who are interested in a more thorough approach to Australian Studies.

The volume begins with an essay on the current state of the writing of history. Next there is a general description of the institutions likely to be of interest to anyone concerned with Australian studies. Most of these institutions will perforce be archives, libraries, museums and galleries but also mentioned are some others which provide information services related to Australia's past and present. Sections I to X contain over 3000 references to books which can be rightly considered basic reading for anyone wishing to gain an understanding of the many facets of Australian physical and social conditions and their history.

Australians: a guide to sources is the work of over 60 scholars, who have compiled lists of the most important books in their field, together with an explanatory essay which sets the literature in perspective, with regard both to time and to related topics.

A word of explanation may be appropriate about the audience for whom this work is intended. Quite obviously there are many kinds of readers—indeed, almost every person approaches reading and study from a different background and with a different attitude. Yet this collection of reading lists had to be pitched at some standard level and, in conformity with the other volumes of *Australians: a historical library*, this book is designed for 'the intelligent man or woman in the street', who can be assumed to have had a reasonable level of education—and it matters nought whether that education was received through formal schooling at primary, secondary, maybe tertiary level, or whether it was acquired through self instruction or through adult education courses. This average reader has no special knowledge of Australian history beyond what has been learnt at school, but is assumed to have a genuine interest in learning more about Australia.

This conspectus of Australian studies is one way in which Australia can be described and studied. Such a survey can only be based on an existing literature; while there are always new trends in the writing of history which claim to offer a different and 'better' approach, a literature survey should reflect the dominant historiographical strain of the period it deals with.

This guide to the literature on Australian studies adopts an historical approach in that the background reading cited on all aspects of the subject includes significant

works of the past. The compilers have endeavoured to cite recent publications also, so that each chapter reflects the current state of publishing related to its subject. The cut-off date for this literature survey is the end of 1984.

The division of the bibliography into ten sections, further subdivided into 55 topics, is designed to help students of Australia to obtain a systematic overview of the land, the people, the history and structure of Australian society, and of the life Australian people lead. The bibliography begins in Section I with general reference works that will help readers to identify dates and general facts about Australia, to ascertain what printed literature there is on Australia and where to find statistical data relating to Australia. Then follow literature surveys of the physical environment of the Australian continent, its geology, flora and fauna, all of which are unique in many respects.

The importance attached to the understanding of Australian Aboriginal society is reflected in the lengthy bibliography that makes up Section IV. This survey has been compiled with the help of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Library and it is hoped that it will be of particular use to all who are concerned with Aboriginal issues in Australian studies.

The literature on early European contacts with this continent—its discovery by European sailors, the first settlements, the exploration of the interior—is described in Section VI, while that on the political developments which led to the federation of the original six colonies and the contemporary political scene is treated in Section VII.

The extensive treatment of the literature on Australian economic and social history in Sections VIII and IX reflects the background to current thinking on the development of this country. Much of the literature cited relates to the origins of these developments, but care has been taken to list also books that comment on the present.

It is not always easy to distinguish between society and culture, and there will be aspects of social history which some readers might have preferred to see treated in greater detail. However, the editors are keenly aware that acceding to all the current approaches in the study of social history would merely date this work, and would add little to its value as a prime source of information on Australia. By the same token the literature related to cultural history, as presented in Section X, reflects the breadth of the subject, and the methods by which subdivisions have been marked for separate treatment represent the view of the editors.

Each bibliography is introduced by a brief essay in which the compiler sets out a general view of the subject; each contains suggestions and explanations related to the limits of the literature survey and the reasons for exclusions, and contains some sources not included in the reading lists. The literature is so large that strict limits had to be imposed on the length of each contribution and none of the bibliographies claims to be exhaustive.

The majority of the books cited in these bibliographies have been published since 1950, and the editors have adopted the simple rule of referring users to the latest edition known at the time of going to press. Where that edition has been reprinted more recently, an appropriate note has been added to the descriptive comment. For books published before 1950 our preferred practice has been to cite the first edition of a work cited and to indicate reprints or new editions where they exist. Some of the bibliographies are arranged in chronological sequence to emphasise the historical significance of the entries. This is particularly important with the older works.

With regard to the imprint, the authority of the *Australian national bibliography* was accepted for the place of publication, the name of the publisher and the date.

It was decided to abbreviate the name and delete the place of publication of the most frequently occurring publishers, so that Melbourne University Press is shown simply as 'MUP'. A list of the abbreviations, which also includes details of the place of publication, will be found on page xviii.

For those who wish to study a topic in greater depth, the editors recommend that they read with special care the literature surveys that precede the bibliography of their chosen topic. A close examination, and eventually a close familiarisation, with the appropriate reference works listed in Section II will be essential. There are many hints and warnings set out in the accompanying survey of reference books, but it cannot be stressed sufficiently that those who want to make progress with Australian studies must first have a firm grasp of the guides to information sources. Such books should be studied in a practical manner to understand their salient good points and their weak spots. To name but two examples, the student of any aspect of Australian history must learn about the purpose and scope of the *Australian public affairs information service*, just as the student of the Australian flora must know the scope and regional coverage of the basic reference works for the identification of Australian plants.

We hope that this volume will be helpful to those who wish to gain an overview of the history of Australia, the intellectual routes Australians have travelled and the external and internal influences that have shaped their writing.

It remains to be added that this large undertaking owes much to many friends and colleagues. The contributors of essays and of bibliographies are named in the appropriate places; their labour has been entirely voluntary and the Management Committee of History Project Incorporated, and the editors of this volume, are much indebted to all.

Our special thanks are due to Mrs Julie G. Marshall, whose untiring effort and vigilance ensured that standards of bibliographic citation are high and consistent, and that the reading lists harmonise, bibliographically speaking, with the accompanying essays. Miss Jean Hagger compiled the index and we are very grateful to her for the thoughtful and thorough approach brought to this important task. Also, we gratefully acknowledge the help of Michael Harrington, AGPS, Canberra, in compiling the tables on bibliographic control.

The typing assistance received from Mrs S. Enright and Mrs Nancy McElwee is gratefully acknowledged.

Support for this volume by the University of New South Wales, La Trobe University, and the Canberra College of Advanced Education is formally but no less sincerely and gratefully acknowledged.

D. H. BORCHARDT

VICTOR CRITTENDEN

ABBREVIATIONS

Periodical titles are followed, as appropriate, by volume or series number, issue number and year of publication.

A & R	Angus & Robertson, Publishers, Sydney	J	<i>Journal</i>
AACOBS	Australian Advisory Council on Biblio- graphic Services	J Aust stud	<i>Journal of Australian studies</i>
		JR Aust Hist Soc	<i>Journal of the Royal Aus- tralian Historical Society</i>
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation)	LBSA	Library Board of South Australia
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	MUP	Melbourne University Press, Parkville, Vic.
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, Victoria	NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT
ACT	Australian Capital Territory	NSW	New South Wales
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, ACT	NT	Northern Territory
		NY	New York
AIIA	Australian Institute of International Affairs	OUP	Oxford University Press, Melbourne. OUP pub- lications issued in London are shown as London, OUP.
ANUP	Australian National University Press, Canberra, ACT		
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (its Central Library and Information Services are located in East Melbourne, Vic.)	P	page(s)
		repr	reprinted
		rev	revised
		SA	South Australia
CUP	Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, Vic. CUP publications issued in Cambridge are shown as Cam- bridge, CUP.	SUP	Sydney University Press, Sydney, NSW
		UNSWP	University of New South Wales Press, Kensing- ton, NSW
ed(s)	editor(s)/edited	UQP	University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld
edn	edition	UWAP	University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA
et al	and others		
facs	facsimile edition		
Hist stud	<i>Historical studies</i>	vol(s)	volume(s)
IUP	Irish University Press, Dublin, Ireland	WA	Western Australia



'Anigozanthos flavidus, yellow kangaroo paw.
Engraving by F. Sansom after S. Edwards, 1803.
Hand-coloured.

IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

CHAPTER 1

THE WRITING OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

STUART MACINTYRE

THE FIRST and over-riding impression was that Australia had no history. So unfamiliar were the topography and climate, the flora and fauna, so negligible seemed the civilisation of its inhabitants, that the white newcomers could discern no signs of a recognisable antiquity. In *A sketch of New South Wales* (1845), written by one who had settled briefly, the colony was said to call up 'no train of ideas that are associated with the past, it has no fossil remains of any consequence, not even the vestige, so far as I know, of any one thing from which the curious might deduce that Australia ever had been different from what it was when Cook landed on its shores'.

The absence of history was reiterated so often and so insistently that it became a cliché, one that persists even to this day. Yet for every denial that Australia possesses a past, there is a writer anxious to tell its story. The purpose of this survey is to explore the various ways in which Australians have sought to construct their history. Such an exploration requires a lengthy and sometimes indirect journey over contrasting terrain. It begins with the expectations that the first white settlers brought with them and an adaptation of their sensibilities to the new land. It considers their reluctance or inability to recognise the antiquity of the Aborigines, who preceded them by as much as 50 000 years. It moves from the use of history as political argument in the first part of the nineteenth century to the search for a historical identity in the second half. It follows the codification of history into an intellectual science over which professional specialists preside. For all the advances in knowledge this made possible, I wish to argue that the rapid growth of the discipline in the universities was not wholly beneficial and that its practitioners have since lost much of their earlier confidence and authority. A survey of the present uses of the Australian past does not allay these fears, though it draws a cautious optimism from the increasing awareness of the need for a history that can once more speak to the needs of the present.

ESTABLISHING THE PAST

The conviction that Australia was a country without a past was shaped by two impulses in the European imagination. In the first place was the long-established literary practice of treating the antipodes as a place of contrarities where everything was turned upside down. Whether the writer offered fantasy, utopia, allegory or even turned the device to more satirical purposes as did Swift in the best-known example of this genre, *Gulliver's travels* (1726), the essence of the

antipodean fantasy was its deliberate dissociation from the known world. When Europeans first came to Australia they were therefore fully alert to the weird and the bizarre. We find in their descriptive writings a fascination with the kangaroo, the possum, the platypus and other oddities which confirmed their expectation that they would find here 'such an inversion in nature as is hitherto unknown'. The novelty of these fantastic characters softened the newcomers' disappointment with such an inhospitable environment:

Kangaroo, Kangaroo!
 Thou Spirit of Australia,
 That redeems from utter failure,
 From perfect desolation,
 And warrants the creation
 Of this fifth part of the Earth
 Which would seem an after-birth ...

The reference here to failure and desolation draws our attention to a second and more sharply focused imaginative expectation. For as the propertied class of eighteenth-century England enclosed and improved the land to increase its yield, as they reclaimed and drained and cleared, so correspondingly there developed a feeling for the charms of unaltered nature and the picturesque landscape. The new sensibility, which turned the remaining uncultivated regions of the British Isles—principally the Lake District, the Scottish Highlands and the Welsh mountains—into objects of conspicuous aesthetic consumption, did so by investing them with a romanticised antiquity. The very conception of beautiful scenery was inextricably interwoven with a sense of the past, as is seen in this passage from the travel writings of a genteel Englishwoman on the Welsh border:

The hills seem to have a deeply murmured eloquence, and we understand their tales of times gone by; the rivers roll along their volumed and rapid waters, and we hear in the mighty music, the voices of 'men of olden days', who dwelt, fought or died within its sound.

Yet consider the same writer's response to the Australian landscape when, several years later, she emigrated to New South Wales. As she crossed the Blue Mountains, she observed 'a dreary monotony of form and colour'; the trees that covered them, 'instead of a beauty in the landscape ... were a deformity', while the Bathurst plains were a 'heavy, weary monotony'. Some perpendicular cliffs, broken and fissured in fantastic shapes, struck her as resembling the ruins of a castle, but this thought merely confirmed her distaste:

Had I been travelling in the old country I should at once have decided that these were truly the ruins of some mighty mountain-fortress of former days ... but the existence of poetry or imagination in New South Wales is what none who know and have felt the leaden influence of its ledger and day-book kind of atmosphere would believe it guilty of suffering.

From the very beginning of European settlement, the new country had evoked such responses. In 1789 Captain Watkin Tench led a party inland from the settlement at Sydney Cove and found that within just a few kilometres, save for an occasional kangaroo and the melancholy sound of the crow, the solitude of 'the trackless immeasurable desert' was 'complete and undisturbed'. Three years later the convict artist Thomas Watling lamented the flatness and monotony of his place of exile: 'the landscape painter may in vain seek here for that beauty which arises from happily-opposed offscapes'. Throughout the nineteenth century the belief that Australia was deficient in antiquity, charm and romance remained a conventional cliché. 'It is true', wrote an art critic in 1894, 'that there are no lovely autumnal tints common to that season in Europe, nor can one find historic ruins to convey an interest to the landscape'. 'It is taken for granted', acknowledged a historian in 1913, 'that there can be no gleams of the picturesque in a tale so brief, and of tints so sober'.

The grudging tone in which these writers formulated their penance ('It is true', 'It is taken for

granted') suggests that the conventional wisdom, while still commanding formal respect, had long since been recognised for the platitude it was. Few challenged it directly before the close of the century. Some mocked it, like the critic of the 1850s who acknowledged with heavy irony that Australia possessed none of the 'archaeological accessories' so necessary for the novelist's art: no ruins encumbered with ivy, no spring panel and secret passage, no ghostly environs, not so much as a house with seven gables. Some protested against its excesses, including those indignant locals who took issue with Adam Lindsay Gordon's reference to Australia's scentless blossoms and songless birds. Even the most iconoclastic, however, were constrained within the same confines of the imagination. In their attempt to establish an Australian past they simply reworked the conventions.

The process can be observed clearly in the novel, which was at this time the most influential form of historical literature. The same sensibility that enabled writers to see the landscape as a place of romantic antiquity was associated with a new appreciation of the past. In the hands of Sir Walter Scott—and Scott was read widely in Australia from as early as the 1820s—the historical novel became something more than a period piece whose modern characters were decked out in perfunctory archaisms; it became an imaginative reconstruction of a complete way of life with precise visual description, close attention to detail and conscious identification with the bygone age.

Scott's influence bore directly on the British historian Macaulay, the German von Ranke, and indirectly through them on the writing of history in Australia, but for the moment we are concerned with his literary impact. It was profound. Writers as diverse as Marcus Clarke, Price Warung and William Hay followed Scott in basing fiction directly on historical records. Newspapers, journals, memoirs, almanacs, pamphlets, parliamentary papers and even the very



Nineteenth-century depiction of kangaroos in a glass inlay mosaic frieze in the state room of the Maharana of Udaipur, Shiv Niwas Palace, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.

ROY LEWIS

convict records were assembled and reworked for dramatic effect. 'As giving you some idea of my methods of working up historical matter', explained Price Warung, 'I will state that I can give documentary evidence for the main incidents of every story ... and that on the average I refer, for the bare detail of each narrative, to 50 volumes in mss'. More generally, the habit was soon established of locating fiction in the past: Henry Kingsley's *The recollection of Geoffry Hamlyn* is set in the 1820s and 1830s; Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery under arms* (serialised 1882–83) takes place in the early 1860s; Henry Handel Richardson's *The fortunes of Richard Mahoney* (1917) begins on the goldfield in the 1850s. From novels such as these, rather than from any piece of historical writing in the strict sense, a feeling for the Australian past was created.

How could a pleasing narrative be wrought from such unpromising material? What could be done with so desolate a landscape and such a discord of nature? One solution was to make a virtue of necessity. Australia's very lack of a past could then be seen as offering the opportunity to construct its own future. 'It is true', wrote the poet Charles Harpur, that Australia's past had not been 'hallowed in history' by the achievements of poets, statesmen or warriors; 'in this country Art has done nothing but Nature everything. It is ours, then, alone to inaugurate the future'. Or as an earlier poet had put it, 'Anticipation is to a young country what antiquity is to an old'. Such a notion can be seen in the earliest narratives of white settlement. The sound of axes breaking the timeless solitude of the virgin forest became a standard device whereby the narrator imagined the civilisation that was to be. In his *Account of a voyage to establish a colony at Port Phillip* (1805), the naval officer J.H. Tuckey recalled how he had watched a team of convicts yoked to a cart, the wheels of which were sunk up to the axles in sand. As he witnessed their exertions on the unpromising wastes of Sorrento he had a vision of 'a second Rome, rising from a coalition of Banditti ... superlative in arms and in arts, looking down with proud superiority upon the barbarous nations of the northern hemisphere'. Such conceits went back to Gibbon and they were to become a stock-in-trade of the historical imagination—Macaulay would anticipate a future New Zealander standing on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St Paul's. By such means the reader was reminded of the transience of all civilisations.

The New World could thus be seen as a place of redemption on whose broad acres the industrious emigrant might find peace, happiness and prosperity. It can be seen that this notion of Australia as an arcadian paradise was wholly derivative, promoted by English writers catering for an English audience and reworking the old theme of the antipodes as a place where a lost ideal might be regained. Their creation, the 'colonial romance', called for only the most formulaistic treatment of the Australian environment since Australia served merely as a picturesque background against which the manly hero made good. And while one local writer protested against these literary caterers for modern civilisation, 'ever ready to construct historiettes concerning lands which [they have] never seen', others adopted the same idiom and sentiments. Insofar as the colonials sought to impart a little more verisimilitude to the genre, they simply assimilated local details into conventional romantic images. In effect, these writers solved the problem of an Australian past by making it synonymous with that of the mother country.

Not so Marcus Clarke. He wrote not of the prosperous sheep runs and goldfields but of the convict settlements; not of redemptions but of exile, atavism and despair; not of sylvan beauty but of the 'weird melancholy' of the bush. In the convict stories he collected into *Old tales of a young country* (1873) and then in *His natural life* (1874), which listed its historical documentation in an appendix, Clarke set out to show that Australia had its own exotic past.

Writing less than one hundred years after white settlement, Clarke heightened the distance of the 'rude adventurous life of those early colonial days' with melodramatic effects. But for all that he learned from Balzac and Poe, it is unclear whether he transcended the limits of the romantic sensibility or merely inverted it. His very insistence on the macabre loneliness of Australian scenery, unhallowed by an association with the past ('From the melancholy gum strips of bark hang and rustle') echoes the description written fifty years earlier by an English traveller of 'miserable looking trees that cast their annual coats of bark and present to the eyes of the raw European the appearance of being actually dead'.

SUPPRESSING THE PAST

It takes an unusual arrogance to ignore a culture that was old when the English language was new. Clarke regarded the Aborigines as 'simply a set of repulsive, filthy savages', bereft of literary possibilities and therefore playing no part in his view of history. He was not alone in this. Most historians (though not all—Rusden, considered below, is an exception) working in the second half of the nineteenth century thought of Aborigines as irrelevant to the real history of the country, which began with its white occupation. A correspondent of the *Moreton Bay Courier* predicted in 1859 that when the history of Australia came to be written, 'the Aborigines will be passed by in a few lines'. He was right. Exactly one hundred years later a review of historical writing concluded with the observation that 'the Australian aboriginal is noticed in our history only in a melancholy anthropological footnote'. W.E.H. Stanner, who did as much as anyone to remedy this suppression, called it the great Australian silence.

It had not always been so. During the early years of colonial settlement, the Aborigines were objects of intense curiosity and few writers failed to include in their descriptive accounts of the new land some consideration of the customs and mores of its earliest inhabitants. Nor were these observers altogether oblivious of the Aboriginal achievement—the simplified ingenuity of their material culture, the absence of rank in their social organisation and the strong sense of sociability manifested in the readiness with which they greeted the first comers. 'The natives of New South Wales possess a considerable portion of that acumen, or sharpness of intellect, which bespeaks genius', judged Watkin Tench. Yet even here the Aborigines were taken to be in a state of nature, unsoftened by religion, unpolished by arts and sciences, 'unmoulded into anything like shape of mind'.

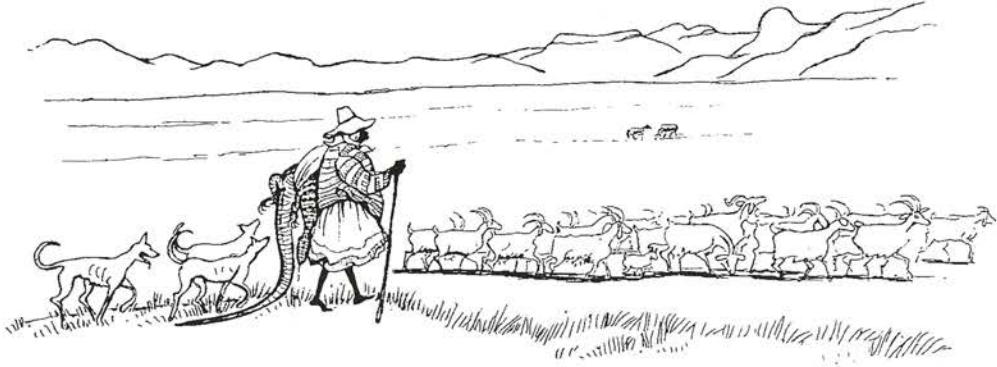
And how quickly the idealisation of the noble savage gave way to abuse of the 'most insolent and troublesome savage'. As soon as the whites encountered resistance from those they expropriated, the myth collapsed. 'A thousand times . . . have I wished', wrote Tench, 'that those European philosophers whose closet speculations exalt a state of nature above a state of civilization could survey the phantom which their heated imaginations have raised'. Similarly, a historian writing in 1839 was confident that if Rousseau had visited Australia he would not have hesitated whether the savage or social life was to be preferred. There was sharp disagreement over the distribution of responsibility for the breakdown in race relations, as well as over the policy the colonial administrators should pursue. Common to all these writers, however, were the assumptions that the Aborigine was a primitive who had failed to advance down the path of historical progress—or, alternatively, had retreated—and that it was futile to lead him down it:

As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die.

The Aborigines, then, had no history.

The inevitable extinction of this doomed race provided the starting point for subsequent investigations; indeed it was the imminence of their expected disappearance that stimulated an interest in them as the vital clue that might 'elucidate the great mystery of the peopling of the world'. Such a primitive race, it was reasoned, must surely provide the key. Accordingly, the emergent doctrines of evolution were harnessed to such classificatory schemes as phrenology, osteology and philology, and applied to the Aboriginal remnants. At times the gentlemen scholars of the learned societies rivalled Burke and Hare in their ghoulish disregard for the most elementary proprieties. The corpse of the last so-called 'full-blood' Tasmanian Aboriginal male, who died in 1868, was cut up by members of the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Royal College of Surgeons, one of whom had a purse made out of a portion of the skin. Similarly, the skeleton of Truganini was acquired and subsequently put on display in the museum. It was not cremated until 1976.

James Bonwick, schoolmaster and prolific author, first became interested in the Tasmanian Aborigines in 1842 when he visited Flinders Island and met some of the few survivors of the white invasion. Convinced of the inevitability of their demise, he reflected on the fate of a people



Old Polly brings in the milking goats, a drawing by Elizabeth Durack at Argyle Station, East Kimberley, WA in 1934.

ELIZABETH DURACK

who had sustained themselves for an epoch whose duration he could not measure but which, he thought, might well go back before the emergence of the European. 'It was there and then', he recorded subsequently, 'I conceived writing the narrative of the now departed people'. Bonwick's researches resulted in a number of books, the most important of which is the *Daily life and origin of the Tasmanians* (1870). He began it by paraphrasing a comparison that Cook had drawn a hundred years earlier—'it may even be doubted if the Tasmanian Aborigines did not eat better, sleep better and laugh more than the majority of our favoured and enlightened Europeans'—and throughout his account of the Aborigines' food, dress, language, pastimes, government, morals and beliefs, he maintained this perspective. The approach and the very wording of the comparison are reflected in Geoffrey Blainey's *Triumph of the nomads* (1975).

Though by no means alone, Bonwick was unusual among his contemporaries in his estimate of the antiquity of the Aborigines' mode of existence and his determination to reconstruct it from the remaining fragments. He continued the practice of seeking their origins in Africa or Asia, for he retained the conviction that Aborigines occupied a low rung on the evolutionary ladder and must therefore be descendants of some known primitive race; but he dismissed the suggestion that they were recent arrivals or that the Australian continent had risen lately from the seabed. Nevertheless, he qualified their antiquity in two respects: first, it was conditional on isolation and could not withstand the arrival of the whites; and second, it was timeless and unchanging. The Aborigines had existed for millenia in a state of suspended animation. 'They knew no past, they wanted no future.' Similar assumptions informed the work of Lorimer Fision and Alfred Howitt, who in the 1870s first applied anthropological methods to the study of Australian Aborigines, and until well into the twentieth century practitioners in this field continued to treat Aborigines as primitives.

Bonwick was here setting at nought the body of Aboriginal knowledge and belief concerning their past that he had described under the chapter heading 'Legends'. Today they are usually known as the Dreaming. These are the stories the Aborigines handed down from generation to generation, stories that varied from one group to another and, in the manner of oral tradition, were subject to borrowing and accretion. They told of things that happened when people and

nature came to be as they are. Expressed in myth, ritual and practice, they were at once a cosmogony and a source of knowledge held sacred and timeless. That they also constituted a valid way of addressing the past took a long time to penetrate the European consciousness.

Untutor'd children, fresh from Nature's mould,
No songs have ye to trace the times of old.

So Wentworth had written in 1823. Even when European settlers began to adopt Aboriginal placenames, they did so with an almost total disregard for the hallowed significance of the topography. Generations of Australian pupils learned of Romulus and Remus but, in Victorian schools at least, it was not until the 1930s that the reader, *Some myths and legends of the Australian Aborigines*, was introduced into the syllabus. It would be a mistake to equate the Dreaming with historical knowledge, its meaning is at once larger and less precise than that. The Dreaming does not embody a sequence of events in linear time moving towards a destination, nor does it postulate a past Golden Age. It is a statement of what is thought to be permanent and its precepts help to maintain the permanency. Our notion of history, the history Europeans sought to create after they settled in Australia, was but a substitute: in a society where tradition had been transplanted and authority had to be established, it sought to impose order by the puny means of an attenuated historical continuity.

HISTORY AS POLEMIC

The making of a historical record began with the first fleet. Phillip, Collins, Hunter, Tench and White all kept, and published, accounts of the chief events during the foundation years. They wrote as men charged with creating a settlement out of the most unlikely materials but they wrote also with an appreciation that they were planting English civilisation in Australia—and it is this mixture of pathos and grandeur that lends their work a lasting fascination; we regard them, in the words of an eminent authority on the period, 'with a little of that awe with which Britishers now invest the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler Bede'. Their narratives were supplemented by other writers catering to the curiosity of the British reading public with memoirs, journals of exploration and travel, descriptive and scientific reports, emigrant manuals and literature designed to promote land companies. All these publications contain historical material, albeit of a fragmentary and often derivative character.

In what sense can we discern a tradition of historical scholarship? If history is something more than the mere compilation of records and the simple relation of past happenings, it is surely distinguished by the way its material is collected and worked into a coherent whole. Some purpose must work as an ordering principle on the bare sequence of events. On such a basis it is possible to construct a line of early histories: William Wentworth's *Statistical, historical and political description of the colony of New South Wales* (1819); John Dunmore Lang's *A historical and statistical account of New South Wales* (1834); perhaps Henry Melville's *The history of the island of Van Diemen's Land* (1835) and James Macarthur's *New South Wales: its present state and future prospects* (1837); certainly John West's *The history of Tasmania* (1852). While far from exhaustive, this list embraces the most notable examples of a genre: each was concerned with the development and maintenance of political authority, and how that authority worked on the society to determine its shape and character. Furthermore, in each case the demonstration of the results of past policies was at the same time an argument for policies designed to promote a different social order.

The very circumstances of its creation illuminate the nature of this sort of history. Its author was a man of affairs, closely involved in the political questions of the day. He had but a limited documentary record on which to base his work and his opportunities for research were restricted. Lang's habit was to undertake this 'literary labour' on voyages back to Britain; this, he said, was 'to obviate the overpowering ennui that would otherwise be almost unendurable', but it is equally true that shipboard conditions offered this frenzied man a rare opportunity to give the task his undivided attention. He was therefore reliant on the 'researches and extracts' he managed to complete before his departure. Wentworth's and Macarthur's books were produced in

England from materials available there, while West had to find time, amid his editorial duties in Launceston, to visit Hobart in order to consult official records and private papers.

Lacking a substantial body of documentation, all these writers drew heavily on testimony or first-hand experience. This is not to say that they were unconcerned with accuracy or questions of detail. On the contrary, much turned on such matters in an intimate society whose past was so brief and factious. The young Wentworth was overcome with indignation when he read in H.G. Bennet's *Letter to Lord Sidmouth* (1819) that his father had gone to New South Wales as a convict; but his own investigations revealed that the truth was hardly more palatable—emigration had been more or less dictated by the bench. James Macarthur called on Lang to account for a statement he had made in his *Historical and statistical account* concerning the role of his father, John Macarthur, in the Rum Rebellion; Lang sent him away with 'a small pamphlet on the subject' and heard no more. The authority of the printed record was already evident.

These writers organised their material in the narrative form. They put events into chronological sequence and focused on a single, coherent story to demonstrate the consequences of official policy. In their high moral tone, their cultivation of a classical style with lengthy periods and balanced, subordinate clauses, their range of allusion and their use of irony, they followed the literary model that had been created in eighteenth-century England:

if there is joy in heaven among the angels of God over every one sinner that repenteth [wrote Lang], we may well conceive the deep interest with superior intelligences would naturally feel at the establishment of the penal colony on the coast of New Holland.

The most accomplished writers, Lang and West, had the greatest familiarity with historical literature, but all were deeply concerned with the rhetorical aspects of their art and with its moral responsibilities. 'One of the most sacred duties of the annalist', wrote Wentworth, was to judge public characters 'with that severity of reprobation or of praise to which their conduct in public life may have entitled them'. The intention was to sway the reader and carry the judgment. Wentworth's, Lang's and Macarthur's efforts were directed to the seat of power in London, where their books were published. There they aimed to win parliament and the Colonial Office to their interpretation of the past and their blueprint for the future.

For Wentworth the history of the colony showed the disastrous effects of its autocratic government and restrictions on commerce. If Australia was to rise from 'the abject state of poverty, slavery and degradation to which she is so fast sinking', then it must attract free migrants with constitutional liberties, able to benefit from the economic opportunities offered by its broad acres. For Lang too, the mistaken policies of the crown had stifled progress, first by the favours it had shown to convicts and then by its encouragement of 'sheep and cattle mania'. He sought measures that would encourage 'a numerous, industrious and virtuous agricultural population'. And for Macarthur, 'if wise measures are now adopted, the false steps of the past may soon be retrieved'. He had to go to London to present the petition of the exclusives, seeking the replacement of transportation with assisted migration for the consolidation of a landed gentry, and the book that bore his name was produced as a means to that end.

West's *History of Tasmania* is at once the culmination of this form of historical literature and its point of transition. He began writing in 1847, just after it was learned that transportation to Van Diemen's Land would continue. He finished in 1852, on the eve of the final victory of the anti-transportation movement in which he played a prominent part. More than two hundred pages were given over to a history of transportation and the entire work is permeated by his abhorrence of the evil. The crucial point is that these arguments were addressed primarily to an Australian audience. The book itself was published in Launceston and offered by the author to the rising generation of native Tasmanians—he preferred that term to the older Van Diemen's Land, with its connotations of 'bondage and guilt'—in the hope that it would 'gratify their curiosity, and offer to their view the instructive and inspiring events of the past'.

A page had been turned. With the granting of self-government to the colonies it was no longer necessary to address such arguments to Westminster, nor to enclose them in the elaborate

historical garb by which British legislators could recognise them. As a contemporary historian of New South Wales wrote, self-government 'fixes a date up to which the previous history of the colony forms of itself an era, or period of history'. It was now up to the colonists themselves to inaugurate a new era.

HISTORY AS PROGRESS

The speedy resolution of constitutional issues in the newly established colonial legislatures may have allowed politics to lapse into a valid mediocrity, but for the historian it posed anew the problem of finding a proper subject for commemoration. When self-government was granted by Britain, the old quarrels were rendered irrelevant and attempts to present them in a progressive or 'Whig' framework as a fight for liberty came to seem more than a little absurd. What now should the colonial historian record?

This was the question that William Westgarth asked in 1864 when he rewrote his account of *The colony of Victoria*. 'There must be little worthy of the venerable name of history', he wrote, 'in the brief rude life of most of our colonial settlements'. He decided that their chief interest lay in their remarkable progress. Similarly, Thomas McCombie began his *History of the colony of Victoria* (1858) with the observation that 'The period over which this history extends is hardly twenty years; but such has been its wonderful progress that the annals of all the nations would be ransacked in vain for a parallel to it'. So too, in the preface of his *History of New South Wales* (1862), argued Roderick Flanagan; and again in 1867 Samuel Bennett, the proprietor of the *Sydney Empire*, gathered his articles on the colonial past to show that 'the rise of great commercial communities in the course of little more than half a century . . . presents one of the most striking features in the history of mankind'. Indeed, when Westgarth returned to the theme in 1889 with *Half a century of Australasian progress*, every colony had produced its paean to that secular deity. The genre culminated with the work of the New South Wales statistician, T.A. Coghlan, who in *The progress of Australasia in the nineteenth century* (1903) could draw on an unparalleled knowledge of the official sources.

These exercises in self-congratulation heightened the contrast between the circumstances that had prevailed before self-government and those that now obtained. McCombie, himself a member of the Victorian parliament, wrote of a 'perfect despotism' giving way to 'extreme democracy'. James Fenton, in his *History of Tasmania* (1884), telescoped a whole series of changes into a single moment. With the establishment of responsible government, he wrote, 'we now enter upon a new era': transportation was abolished; the depredations by bushrangers and Aborigines ceased; some of the wealth that was dug out of the ground in Victoria found its way across Bass Strait; commerce made 'a giant stride' and civic life flowered. Similarly, the historians of Queensland treated 1859, when the colony separated from New South Wales and became self-governing, as the great divide. In their very change of names—Victoria in place of the Port Phillip district, Tasmania instead of Van Diemen's Land, Queensland rather than Moreton Bay—the self-governing colonies avoided the disputations and embarrassments of the past.

While therefore no longer so overtly political in focus, these histories remained wedded to the notion of continuous progress. They were concerned with recording what Macaulay had described as 'the history of physical, of moral and of intellectual improvement' which in this case was measured in flocks and crops, bricks and mortar, and then in the civilisation these made possible. The new climate of popular sovereignty and self-improvement called for something less remote than the old drum-and-trumpet histories of kings and courtiers; rather, it demanded what Flanagan called 'useful and instructive knowledge'. The proper purpose of history, claimed one writer in 1851, was 'to mark the progress of civilization', and it would be 'more useful to mankind' to record the price of a goose and the wage of a labourer during the reign of Edward III than to fill whole volumes with his glorious victories. With the colonial past, however, this was easier said than done. Most obviously, the writers of these histories of the colonies continued to organise their narratives around administrative decisions and to base their chapter divisions on the reigns of those 'Lilliputian sovereigns', the governors.

THE SEARCH FOR A THEME

To overcome such limitations it was necessary to find some alternative theme or organising principle more closely attuned to popular interest and aspirations. One possibility was exploration. There were obvious attractions in the stories of epic journeys of discovery across water and land, in the privations and dangers that were endured, and in the very act of claiming land which could be opened up for settlement. Cook's *Journals* had made an impact in the eighteenth century; men like Flinders, Sturt and Mitchell developed the genre in the first half of the nineteenth; in the second half, exploration reached new heights of popularity. The tragicomic Burke and Wills were perhaps the most successful in self-promotion, if in little else; but other, more accomplished explorers were fully aware of the literary opportunities:

No work of fiction can excel, or even equal, in romantic and heart-stirring interest, the volumes worthy to be written in letters of gold, which record the deeds and the suffering of these noble toilers in the dim and distant field of discovery afforded by the Australian continent.

The most widely read work of this kind was Ernest Favenc's *History of Australian exploration* (1888). Written by one who had himself sought to win glory, and published in the centennial year, it celebrated 'the indomitable courage, heroic self-sacrifice and dogged perseverance' of the men who had established their claim to 'the proud title of "Australian Explorer"'. In stark contrast, the eccentric George Collingridge failed to win due recognition for his *The discovery of Australia* (1895), largely because his argument that Portuguese mariners had preceded Cook by two centuries was unpalatable to imperial-minded readers. Exploration also attracted the first academic historians, notably George Arnold Wood whose *The discovery of Australia* (1922) was his most successful work. In the schools the explorer became staple fare, but here a lifeless



The new clearing, etching and aquatint by Beatrice Dean Darbyshire, c1925.

ROBERT HOLMES À COURT COLLECTION

recitation of names, places and dates resulted all too often in an aversion to the subject. From this soporific reverence Patrick White tried to rescue *Voss* in 1957 and historians have more recently turned anew to the subject.

Another subject for commemoration was the bushranger. Again, the field was not new—*Michael Howe, the last and worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land* appeared as early as 1818, while James Bonwick's *The bushrangers* (1856) was one of his more commercially successful enterprises—but these were merely gratifying a morbid fascination with violence and retribution. Then there was the oral tradition, transmitted through ballad and folklore, that extended in subterranean fashion right through the century to surface dramatically from time to time in declarations like Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter of 1879. Three years later, under the pseudonym 'Rolf Boldrewood', the pastoralist and goldfield commissioner T.A. Browne began serialising a novel based on reports of bushranging in New South Wales during the 1860s; in book form, *Robbery under arms* was reprinted more than thirty times over the next fifty years.

Browne took the well-worn theme of crime and its consequences and breathed new life into it. No longer was the bushranger a desperate figure, hardened beyond recall; he now exhibited a manly independence, gallantry and loyalty to his mates. Further, his bushcraft and nativist values stamped him as unmistakably Australian, and suggested the pleasing conclusion that the outlaw was a victim of circumstances which, if remedied, would enable future energies to be channelled into more constructive endeavours.

The two streams—the one popular and defiant, the other literary and romantic—converged in a number of bushranging histories that appeared later in the century, notably those of Charles White. White, whose father owned the *Bathurst Free Press*, served as a police roundsman during the twilight years of bushranging in that district and subsequently worked his material into a major part of an aggressively nationalist *Early Australian history* in several volumes (1889–93), and then a *History of Australian bushranging* (1900–06). He was followed by George Boxall, whose *History of Australian bushrangers* (1899) joined the conventional moral judgment ('the story is a terrible one') with the contention that the influence of the bushrangers was not wholly evil: 'to their influence is due some of the sturdy Republicanism of the modern Australians'. Even the ultrarespectable Reverend W.H. Fitchett, headmaster of the Melbourne Methodist Ladies' College and author of the best-selling *Deeds that won the empire* (1898), gave over a quarter of his *Romance of Australian history* (1913) to Ned Kelly. The popular literature grew rapidly—the corpus of works devoted to Kelly alone is vast—and has been sustained more recently by such exponents as Frank Clune, George Farwell and Bill Wannan. Academically, the bushranger was taken up by Russel Ward in *The Australian legend* (1958) and since then has received increasing attention. John McQuilton's *The Kelly outbreak* (1979) points the way forward with its demonstration of how the techniques of social history can be applied successfully to the subject.

Here, then, were two ways of investing the past with a heroic meaning. Yet both had clear limitations. The obvious problem with the explorers was that their endeavours were merely preparatory to what followed; the mores of the bushranger, no matter how determinedly they were recast in a more acceptable mould, could hardly be extended to the society at large. Even Rolf Boldrewood felt it necessary to reassure his readers that novels such as his did not 'have a tendency to injure the moral sense of boys who read them and contrast the lavish rewards and exciting adventures which accompany the outlawed life with the slower and tame career of honest industry'. Furthermore, both themes were essentially peripheral to the achievements and aspirations of most Australians. It was around the more popularly accessible figures of the bushman and the pioneer that an orthodoxy formed.

Celebration of the bushman is associated with the emergence towards the end of the nineteenth century of a popular national literature, and especially with the *Bulletin*. Founded in 1880 and achieving a circulation of 80 000 by 1890, the *Bulletin* achieved its success by blurring the distinction between reader and writer. Encouragement and example taught its subscribers to become contributors of snappy paragraphs and racy yarns, tall stories and anecdotes, ballads and fiction. The avowed purpose was to define and express an Australian sentiment which its writers

took to be most fully exemplified among groups of men travelling and working upcountry. As part of this project they created a 'usable past', one which denounced the evils of convict transportation, celebrated the digger and discerned a tradition of radical egalitarianism among the nomad bushmen, bullockies, shearers, drovers and rural labourers.

Such a past was not so much history as counterhistory. The radical nationalists asserted their memory of the common people against the official record of the governors and the plutocracy. But history in the strict sense as they understood it, as a record of real achievement, had yet to be made and this was the special opportunity of the *New World*. 'If we are not History's legatees', explained the *Bulletin's* literary editor, 'it is because we have the chance to be History's founders and establishers'.

It is easy to point to contradictions embodied in the bush legend, to show that its principal exponents were men who had fled to the cities, drew eclectically from discordant sources and codified the legend at the very point when the conditions it celebrated were disappearing. Even the titles of the works that afterwards recorded this epoch—A.W. Jose, *The romantic nineties* (1933); Vance Palmer, *The legend of the nineties* (1954); A.A. Phillips, *The Australian tradition* (1958)—suggest its ambiguities. For all that, its impact on popular perceptions of the past was profound, since it established the categories and vocabulary whereby an indigenous folklore could be set down in writing. The remarkable success of A.B. Facey's *A fortunate life* (1981) is evidence that the tradition is not yet exhausted.

Veneration of the pioneers became apparent from the middle of the nineteenth century. A song written in 1857 to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the establishment of South Australia captures the tone:

That little band of heroes,
How manfully they plied
The axe, the plough, the harrow,
And labor'd side by side.
For us they cleared, they ploughed, they sowed: a garden now appears
Where first they found a wilderness: those hardy pioneers.

At this time the term 'pioneer' encompassed the firstcomers, regardless of occupation, and honour was attached on the basis of seniority. Hence members of the Ballarat Old Identities Association wore a medal on their watch-chain bearing name and date of arrival. Here already in the tendency towards gerontocracy was a distorting element: those actually involved in opening up new areas of settlement were young, so young that in the Port Phillip district during the 1830s anyone over the age of thirty was known as 'old so and so'. Interest was more apparent in the colonies of free settlement, South Australia and Western Australia, than in the older penal colonies where there was already a reluctance to enquire too deeply into the origins of the early settlers. Characteristically, New South Wales marked its anniversary, 26 January, when the flag was run up at Sydney Cove, with a dinner of the emancipists and native born.

The term 'pioneer' acquired its special meaning towards the end of the century when it came to apply specifically to those who settled and worked the land. The meaning was elaborated by the same *Bulletin* writers who celebrated the values of the bush as the basis of Australian nationhood. In their version of the past they reserved special praise for those who had endured its hardships by dint of courage, enterprise and industry. It was a nostalgic vision. Writing during the 1890s, a period of class turmoil and financial crisis, they reached back to a golden age when lockouts and foreclosures were unknown; and they overlooked, so selective was their historical memory, the conflicts of the 1850s and 1860s when the squatter was an object of contempt.

Popular and ostensibly democratic, the pioneer legend was deeply conservative in its reverence for an idealised past. In this idyllic world there were human imperfections but no irreconcilable class antagonisms; there was good land and poor but no mention of the social, legal or economic determinants of land settlement. In a process that was open to all, the man—or the man and his family, for the pioneer legend was less misogynist than the legend of the nomad

bushman—pitted themselves against the elements, achieved self-sufficiency and bequeathed their legacy to the nation. ‘Some labour that others may enter into the results of their labour’ was how a South Australian official history put it.

The construction of the pioneer legend can be observed in the lengthy gestation of a work published in 1898 as *Letters from Victorian pioneers*. In 1853 Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe had written a circular letter to a number of early squatters, asking them when and how they had taken up their runs. He received 58 replies which provide an unflattering picture of the repression of Aboriginal resistance and suggest how an ambitious earlycomer could get ahead: one respondent who had arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in 1831 with three shillings reported that he owned 7300 sheep in 1853. La Trobe took the replies to England, but subsequently sent them back to his Melbourne agent who deposited them in the public library. Now they appeared with a preface by the librarian extolling these patriarchs for conquering the ‘hardships and perils which beset the pioneer’.

There was by this time an extensive published body of such reminiscences, its heroes claimed, ‘in compliance with oft-repeated requests of many of my friends’. The great majority were written by successful pastoralists and presented their success in the most agreeable terms: ‘They were not speculative; they had no great overdrawn bank accounts; their wants were few and they lived simply and unostentatiously, and exercised a kind and wide hospitality’. By this time, also, the dubious origins of several of these dynasties had faded into obscurity. One history did include a chapter entitled ‘Some strange pilgrim fathers’, but it presented the transportees as ‘a patch of human compost flung on soil which was afterwards to be turned into a garden’.

Finally, the pioneers found their way into commemorative histories, the most able of which was Collier’s *The pastoral age in Australasia* (1911). Here the reader is told that Australia began as a benevolent social experiment which burst its limits with the opening of the grazing lands beyond the Blue Mountains. ‘Now the real life of Australia begins’, Collier states and works a rich tapestry of pastoral dynasties, morals, arts and politics, all ‘the work of the Golden Fleece’. Not until Margaret Kiddle’s *Men of yesterday* (1961) was this elegy matched. More prosaic but no more critical was S.H. (Sir Stephen) Roberts, whose *History of Australian land settlement* (1924) and later *The squatting age in Australia* (1935) established a successful academic career. The pastoral version of the pioneer legend was by no means its only form. In numerous local histories it was applied with equal force to agriculture and other more modest ventures, and, in one seminal article on Australia at large, to the ‘smallholder’.

URBAN, CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL ALTERNATIVES

The chroniclers of the nomad bushman and the pioneer, like those of the explorer and the bushranger, looked for a national identity in the bush. Although Australia was already a remarkably urban society by international standards, the city appeared an unpromising site for distinctly Australian characteristics. The nineteenth-century city, after all, was at once an artefact and symbol of an international economy and cosmopolitan culture; in layout and function one seemed much the same as any other. Yet the city captured the imagination of a number of writers. ‘Where the city of Melbourne stands today, with its modernness and its artificial life’, wrote Edward Jenks in 1895, ‘sixty years ago there was nothing but a silent plain sparsely dotted with clumps of trees and occasionally visited by blackfellows and kangaroos’. Jenks wrote as an Englishman who had spent his three years in the colonies as the professor of law in that city, but the same contrast was drawn in 1857 by the stonemason C.J. Don who came to Australia to stay. ‘Look at yonder city’, he invited an audience gazing across the bay from Williamstown,

illuminated by its magic lamps, its windows glittering with wealth, a city with palaces worthy of kings, and temples worthy of gods, which labour had placed there in the short space of a quarter of a century. Twenty-five years ago, where now the voices of the most accomplished vocalists resound, the wild howl of the savage corroboree or the wind in the wilderness was alone heard . . .

Don and Jenks were separated by the four decades that spanned the gold rushes of the 1850s and the depression of the 1890s, four decades of sustained growth during which belief in the city flourished. The two were separated also by their attitude to urbanism, the pride and confidence of Don giving way to Jenks's insistence on its artificiality—elsewhere he condemned the ugliness, pretension and philistinism of Melbourne. Don welcomed the city as a place of opportunity while Jenks lamented 'the tyranny of the common-place average man'. Both, however, were as one in their conviction that Australian history was a story of civic progress ('the word being used in its purely scientific sense', added Jenks).

Marvellous Melbourne was the most fulsome in self-congratulation. In its heyday, with a grandiose public library, flourishing book trade and literary journals, it supported a group of professional writers who 'devoted themselves to singing Victoria's praises'. They were convinced that theirs was 'the most populous and progressive of all the Australian colonies', and they emphasised above all the amenities and refinements of its major city. Other colonial capitals produced their records of achievement, as did the inland Victorian centre of Ballarat (which, with W.B. Withers' *History of Ballarat*, 1870, was the first Australian city to possess a comprehensive history); but Alexander Sutherland surely went furthest with his boast in *Victoria and its metropolis* (1888) that 'there is nothing wanting in that due degree of all that busy fulness, that scope for sympathy and artistic development which forms the charms of city life ... Melbourne, in short, is not only a city, but most distinctly a metropolis'.

The subtitle of George Sutherland's *Australia; or, England in the south* (1886) suggests how an urban perspective emphasised the imperial relationship. It was not just that the Australian city shared many features with the British city: if it did not, then it was not for want of colonial endeavour. More than this, the creation of cities in the New World testified to the successful colonisation of the imperial metropolis, whose civic architecture was imitated and administrative and political processes re-enacted. The colonists believed that they owed their success to their British heritage since, as G.W. Rusden put it in 1883, 'The most successful colonization is that which founds abroad a society similar to that of the parent country'.

When that heritage came under challenge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the historians who affirmed and defended it displayed a more conservative tone. Rusden, a Victorian public servant who wrote a three-volume *History of Australia* (1883), was probably the gloomiest. Jenks, who wrote his *History of the Australasian colonies* after he returned to England, and the Melbourne banker H.G. Turner, whose main works were a two-volume *History of the colony of Victoria* (1904) and *The first decade of the Australian commonwealth* (1911), shared Rusden's presentiments to a lesser degree. Their starting point was the shallowness of the colonial past and the consequent fragility of its institutions. 'The actors in what has been called the heroic work of civilization are rapidly passing away', explained Rusden to justify the need for a definitive record. The rising generations who have embarked on the task of nation-building 'frequently ignore the teachings of experience', claimed Turner. In regarding history as a school for statesmen they continued a well-established tradition, one that Lang, Macarthur and others had practised before them; and when Jenks explained that he treated 'history as past politics and politics as present history', he was merely repeating the dictum of his Cambridge professor.

They differed from their predecessors chiefly in their restrictive interpretation of political processes. Whereas the earlier writers had a flexible, even experimental attitude to the development of the state, and in both Wentworth's and Lang's cases considered American precedents seriously, the later writers took the English constitution as a fixed and binding model. Little could be learned from the first sixty years of colonial history, since the conditions of responsible government had then been lacking and an 'oppressive formal officialism' could hardly avoid mistakes. For similar reasons even the conservative Turner was surprisingly sympathetic to the Eureka uprising to which he later referred to as *Our own little rebellion*.

In writing of this early period, the emphasis was therefore on British settlement, British expenditure (Jenks remarked in a passing aside on the pioneer legend that 'Australians are sometimes apt to speak as though they and their fathers had done the whole work of building



Portraits of the Reverend J.D. Lang (1799-1878), republican clergyman (left) and of Captain Charles Sturt (1795-1869), explorer of the Australian interior. The engraving of Lang is based on an 1876 photograph by J.T. Gorus. The engraving of Sturt appears in A. Garran (ed) Picturesque atlas of Australasia, Sydney 1886-88.

MITCHELL LIBRARY, ANDERSON COLLECTION

up Australia') and British guidance towards constitutional maturity. Real history began in the 1850s with the colonies embarking on self-government. But they failed to make good their British heritage and instead adopted mischievous innovations designed to turn parliament into a 'mere reflex of the popular will'. The Englishman Jenks was the most charitable with his suggestion that the colonists meant to adopt the Westminster system of government but failed to understand it; Rusden and Turner regarded the debasement of public life more gloomily as the expression of a ruinous levelling tendency.

Neither of the local writers achieved the reputation they sought. Rusden particularly had such a curmudgeonly reputation as almost to preclude serious consideration of his views. 'Nobody that knew him will ever forget him, as peculiar a gentleman as one will encounter in a lifetime. We don't know any Australian resident so distinctly English', wrote the *Melbourne Punch* when he died in 1903. Turner's account of Victorian politics was regarded as violently partisan, while his ingenuous account of his own role during the financial crisis of 1893 invited ridicule. Subsequent opinion has confirmed these judgments. R.M. Crawford in his survey of Australian historiography said that Rusden's intention to write serious history was vitiated by an 'almost ludicrously conservative bias', and despite subsequent claims for his work, the verdict stands.

The usual explanation for the weak impact of the conservatives is to suggest the dominance of a progressive or 'Whig' orthodoxy among Australian intellectuals. That is hardly an apt characterisation of the *fin-de-siècle* mood. The ending of the economic 'Long Boom' and the defeat of the unions in the major strikes of the 1890s shook earlier expectations of unfolding progress. Among radicals there was a noticeable tendency to sever the past, to emphasise once more the novelty of Australia and the need to construct its future. According to such visionaries, it was precisely because the island continent lacked an authentic tradition that its people were presented with the opportunity to throw off the shackles of the Old World. Thus Bernard O'Dowd in 1903:

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
 Are you adrift Sargasso, where the West
 In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
 Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?

'Australia is not a country; it is a symbol. We look downward', spoke the Mystic in a dialogue written by Louis Esson in 1909. His host was less confident: 'The Prometheus of the Australian Imagination is fettered to the mountain of British Fact'. But the Mystic preferred to describe Terra Australis beckoning at 'the sliprails of the Imagination, promising but to the rebels a fresh perception of beauty, an unblazed track to truth'.

INSTITUTIONALISING THE PAST

The closing years of the nineteenth century saw an upsurge of official or quasi-official attempts to commemorate the Australian past. The various colonies had established holidays to mark their foundation or separation, when they usually conducted official ceremonies at the appropriate place. But these were often unsatisfactory. South Australia's Proclamation Day of 1857, for example, was to have been an occasion of medieval amusements, but they were ruined by rain, the speeches were 'filmy effusions' and 'everybody voted everything a bore'. In any case, such anniversaries merely underlined the separateness of the colonies. The national pantheon was conspicuously bare. Cook was venerated and a tablet had been erected in 1822 at the point in Botany Bay on which he was said to have landed, but later heroes were harder to find.

The colonial governments did commission handbooks from time to time in order to publicise the opportunities they presented to migrants and investors, and these exercises in public relations usually included historical chapters. Sometimes governments assisted with handbooks, such as J.H. Heaton's *Australian dictionary of dates and men of the time* (1879) which was taken on by the New South Wales government printer because no other local press was equipped for the job. However, the government printer took it upon himself to censor the contents (on the grounds of propriety he cut an entry on 'Pure Merinos') and lost part of the manuscript. Sometimes histories were sponsored by public societies; for example, in 1860 the Gawler Institute offered 200 guineas for the best history of South Australia.

Alternatively, enterprising publishers got up commemorative histories for public subscribers. These bulky and ornate volumes were not cheap: Sutherland's *Victoria and its metropolis* sold at five guineas, while Garran's *Picturesque atlas of Australasia* (1886) cost ten, which was equivalent to a month's earnings for a skilled workman. Frequently such ventures contained biographical sketches of 'leading and representative citizens' who supplied the information and paid for the privilege. Again, the genre enjoyed official support so that the premier of Western Australia agreed to purchase one hundred copies of W.B. Kimberley's *History of Western Australia: a narrative of her past, together with biographies of her leading men* (1897).

The centenary of white settlement in 1888 aroused a greater and more general attention than any previous anniversary. While the *Sydney Morning Herald* managed to tell the story of the first fleet without mentioning the convicts and the *Bulletin* denounced the festivities as marking the 'meanest event' in Australian history since it inaugurated a 'loathesomeness and moral leprosy', the centenary took on a larger significance because of the growing support for federation. The New South Wales government catered to the renewed interest in the founding fathers with two volumes of a *History of New South Wales from the records* (1889, 1894) based on transcriptions made by Bonwick of material in the Public Record Office and other repositories.

Following his return to England, Bonwick had conceived the idea of transcribing official records along the lines of a Canadian scheme. He had been employed by the Queensland government in 1883 to do a year's copying, and in 1885 and 1886 he performed similar work for South Australia and Victoria. So impressed was the New South Wales premier Henry Parkes with the fruits of a £50 commission than Bonwick spent a further fifteen years in the employ of that state. The fruits of his work, 125 000 sheets of manuscript, formed the basis of eight volumes entitled *Historical records of New South Wales* (1892–1901). These in turn served as a

precedent for an even more ambitious project, the *Historical records of Australia* in 31 volumes (1914–25), which were edited by the irascible Sydney surgeon, Dr Frederick Watson, on behalf of the Commonwealth.

The publication of what their editor called ‘the birth certificates of a nation’ was conceived as part of the duty owed by the new Commonwealth ‘to the nation they are building up, to posterity and to civilization’. Be that as it may, the sales were disappointing. *Historical records of New South Wales* sold on average 120 copies of each volume, and while members of parliament were anxious to receive their complimentary copies of *Historical records of Australia*, its commercial appeal was not much greater.

The very preservation of historical records was a haphazard affair, dependent upon the energies of particular enthusiasts. None of the states made provision for the systematic deposit of official records before the establishment of the South Australian Archives after World War I. While the commonwealth investigated the creation of an archives in the early years of the century and even prepared a bill in the 1920s, nothing was done until World War II. Even the Mitchell Library, the most significant repository in this period, was made possible only by the New South Wales government’s belated acceptance in 1906 of conditions imposed by its donor eight years earlier. David Scott Mitchell was an obsessive bibliophile whose unique collection, including 60 000 volumes of Australiana was offered with an endowment of £70 000 if the government built it a home. Yet many of the legislators dismissed the collection as a ‘lot of convict rubbish’ and the gift was not clinched until the year before Mitchell’s death.

Sensitivity to the convict past was acute during this period of conscious nation-building, as the governor of New South Wales discovered to his cost in 1899. His well-intentioned reference to the country’s ‘birthstain’ caused enormous indignation. Historians were therefore forced to tread warily and Bonwick was careful in his transcriptions to omit names of transportees, ‘save where needful’. For some time afterwards, the attitude persisted that skeletons were best left in closets. Searching during 1940 in the underground vault to which the Tasmanian government consigned its records, the young S.J. Butlin was surprised to receive an invitation to take morning tea with the governor. His Excellency wanted reassurance that Butlin was not convict-chasing.

Similar impulses can be seen at work in the formation and choice of title of the Australian Historical Association in 1901 (it became the Royal Australian Historical society in 1918). During 1899 a group of Sydney enthusiasts contemplated the creation of a society to expedite the acceptance of Mitchell’s offer. Nothing came of it. In the following year, however, a dispute arose in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as to the correct date of the laying of the foundation stone of an old church, and correspondents suggested that there should be an authority to provide an authentic record of such information since ‘the swift advance of civilization is continually . . . sweeping away historical monuments of the past’. From these improbable beginnings a historical society was formed, taking as one of its purposes the compilation of a chronology of interesting and significant events—and eventually the society did produce such a *Calendar of events in Australian history* (1933). It is evident that the imminent creation of a sovereign nationality augmented the value of such antiquarian details, and such issues as the precise place of Cook’s landing exercised members mightily in the early years.

Next came the Historical Society of Victoria (it too became Royal in 1952), formed in 1909 ‘for the purpose of collecting and publishing material relating to the history of the State of Victoria’. Within a year it persuaded the premier to declare a Discovery Day for observance in Victorian schools, marking Cook’s first sighting of the Australian coast; and over the next few years the society erected a rash of tablets to navigators and explorers. After the Victorian came the Queensland Historical Society, formed in 1913 with the avowed object of ‘bringing the student into contact with the older settler’. Other states followed and of course there were numerous local societies, with Ballarat’s Historical Records Society going back to 1896.

None of these state bodies achieved a large membership, nor did they seek one. Enjoying viceregal patronage, they brought together pious members of the older families, a sprinkling of clerics, lawyers and doctors, the professor of history and perhaps a few other practising historians

who would gently nudge the society back towards the mainstream when it threatened to become stranded in nostalgic backwaters. Members met to hear each other read papers which were afterwards published in the society's journal. Though some of the investigations were based on painstaking research, the great majority were indiscriminating and uncritical. The early volumes of the *Victorian historical magazine* have been aptly described as 'a mausoleum of minor preoccupations', and the same holds for the others.

The members guarded their past in a proprietary fashion. Paul and Alexandra Hasluck were young and enthusiastic when they joined the Western Australian Historical Society on its formation in 1926. They found it 'very much an old colonists' show'. Meetings were largely taken up with reminiscences of 'how your cousin and my aunt used to do this or that, and his grandfather was the first person to take cattle from here to there ...'. The memory was highly selective. When Alexandra Hasluck protested against the suppression of some recently discovered letters to a convict, she was told that Western Australia 'was founded as a free colony by gentlefolk: the convicts came later and unwanted, and should not be associated with it'.

While users of records and members of historical societies were few, in the schools there was a vast conscript audience. Against the meagre sale of the *Historical records* can be set Alexander and George Sutherland's textbook *History of Australia* which passed through more than a dozen editions and sold 120 000 copies after its publication in 1877. At first the introduction of history into schools had been resisted. Whether it be British or Australian, the subject would only aggravate religious and national tensions in the new government schools which were meant to cater for all, Protestant and Catholic, English and Irish. 'What one section of the community would regard as facts would be rejected by another', warned the secretary of the New South Wales Council of Education in 1874. Yet before the end of the century history occupied a central place in the curriculum as the principal means of building and strengthening the community:

The aim of history teaching [said an educationist in 1897] is to create a desire to read of the great personages, the wonderful events, and the details of the growth of nations; to develop the intellect along certain lines; to ensure that the community will have one condition at least, and that an important one, for governing itself with wisdom; to foster love of home, country and race, and to elevate morally the coming man and woman.

School history was deliberately circumscribed for didactic purposes. It might well be the case, thought Charles Pearson, the Victorian minister for education, that pupils were incapable of a proper study of the past, for that required a knowledge, practical insight and capacity to understand abstract questions that was beyond them. Therefore:

the first lessons in history ought to concern themselves with what is exalted or tragical, adventurous or picturesque in human or national character, and to deal with the acts and words of men and women rather than with the growth of institutions or the rush and turmoil of revolutions.

In practice history lessons consisted largely of rote learning of names and dates:

In 43 a Roman host
From Gaul assaulted our southern coast,
Caractacus in nine years more,
A captive left his native shore.

Taught thus, Australian history could only appear a brief and colourless epilogue to the history of the mother country. Governors and explorers hardly filled the place occupied by monarchs and generals in the drum-and-trumpet celebration of the British heritage; nor could the colonies find any worthy equivalent to Magna Carta or the Long Parliament since, as the professor of history at the University of Sydney declared, 'the great battles of freedom had already been fought and won before Australia came of age'. Certainly, the writers of Australian texts did their best. Just as Alfred was a good king and John a bad, so Bligh was condemned and Macquarie

commended. The exploits of Cook and Flinders, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, and their successors were traced in tedious detail.

Eventually, some talented writers met the pressing need for more imaginative texts. In *The struggle for freedom* (1904), Walter Murdoch struck the engaging note of decorous informality that was to characterise his later writings, while the sprightly, avuncular tone of G.V. Portus's *Australia since 1606* (1932) is remembered by generations of students. Even so, the increasing emphasis on Australian history seems to have produced an indifference to, if not an active dislike of, the subject among many pupils. The discipline lost ground in the primary schools during the 1950s and in the secondary schools during the 1960s and 1970s. Though there are signs of revival, the present position varies so much from one state to another that it calls for more space than is available here.

HISTORY AS A SCIENCE AND A PROFESSION

We do not know the reactions of the members of the Queensland Historical Society when they assembled for their inaugural meeting on 18 August 1913 and heard the young lecturer at the newly established Queensland University read a paper on 'Methods of historical research'. They surely would have nodded with approval when A.C.V. Melbourne claimed that a nation's concern for its past was a measure of its civilisation. His claim for the utility of history as a source of valuable precedents was hardly contentious: it was conventional wisdom that the prudent could learn from the past, emulate its successes and avoid its mistakes. The members would have welcomed the claim that Australia possessed its own distinctive history and his call for preservation of records.

But when the speaker went on to suggest that the state of Australian historical research was negligible, and that it would remain thus until the university trained scholars in its proper procedures, members may have stirred a little uneasily. This was to make their own work, the collection of sources such as diaries and letters, and the compilation of a basic record, merely preparatory to the work of a trained specialist. Melbourne's description of the procedures of historical analysis—careful comparison and emendation of the sources, critical analysis of fact and opinion, leading to the forming of objective, impartial conclusions—were quite remote from their experience and interests. And when he declared that Macaulay and Carlyle were failures as historians because they had not observed these procedures, the consternation of the older members is easy to imagine. For Macaulay and Carlyle were the two most popular writers of history in the English language during the nineteenth century; they had done more than anyone else to establish a literary tradition of epic narrative which informed and uplifted the reader.

In 1828 Macaulay had described history as 'a compound of poetry and philosophy'. In 1902 the Cambridge professor J.B. Bury declared that it was 'a science, no less and no more'. Melbourne's canons of historical method were based on this later view which derived from the great German historians of the nineteenth century—Niebuhr, Mommsen and, above all, Ranke. It was Ranke, said Bury's predecessor at Cambridge, who was 'the real originator of the heroic study of records'. Ranke insisted on the objectivity of historical truth (history 'as it was', in his celebrated phrase), the priority of facts over concepts and the need to establish the facts by critical study of the primary sources. 'True knowledge', he wrote, 'lies in the knowledge of the facts . . .' From the patient verification of the documentary record, a new school of historians came to expect an accumulation of factual knowledge that would permit the application of inductive methods to produce scientific history.

Even in the late nineteenth century the impact of these procedures began to be felt in Australia. Bonwick had criticised Macaulay for 'faulty research and party prejudice': his own method, he said, was to search for 'absolute truth' in official documents. Rusden, Turner and the Victorian-born lawyer F.P. Labilliere made much of their pioneering work in the Public Record Office in London and were quick to criticise others for taking their guidance from second-hand accounts instead of checking them against the original sources. Yet the emphasis on verisimilitude was more polemical than methodological. Bonwick was merely declaring the duty of an honest

chronicler. Rusden and Turner continued to work in the older tradition of literary history where the accumulation of authentic detail created a density of narrative texture that augmented the power of rhetorical suggestion.

The doctrines of 'scientific history' found their home in Australia in the same place that they found it in Britain—in the universities. The turning of history into a new kind of specialised intellectual activity also converted it into a professional discipline. It used to be that the writing of good history called for a good man applying ordinary powers of judgment to the record of the past. Scientific history, on the other hand, introduced new standards and procedures, called for technical skills and was directed to a new, more specialised audience.

The transmission of the new practices from Cambridge, Oxford and London to the tiny Australian universities was a slow process. Since the universities of Queensland and Western Australia were not created until the eve of World War I, and Tasmania did not teach history, there were in fact only three centres where the subject was professed. Melbourne's first professor of history and political economy, W.E. Hearn, was a classical scholar who had practised at the Dublin Bar before taking up his post in 1855. Somewhere in between his teaching (in 1871 he delivered 30 lectures a week in history, classics, literature, philosophy and political economy) and other duties, he found time to write a major work of political economy, but historical research was out of the question.

Hearn's successor, appointed in 1879, left a reputation for bellicosity and an impressive collection of empty bottles when his house in the university grounds was cleared upon his retirement in 1912, but little else. 'I have work in hand but I have not committed myself to anything very extensive in book form so far', he said after 23 years in the chair. He was followed by (Sir) Ernest Scott who earned the position by writing several books while a Hansard reporter and certainly appreciated the importance of original research, but had little formal training.

In Sydney G.A. Wood became the first professor of history in 1891. He had been educated at Oxford in the 1880s when the transformation was only just beginning and undergraduate studies were intended not as professional preparation but as training for life.

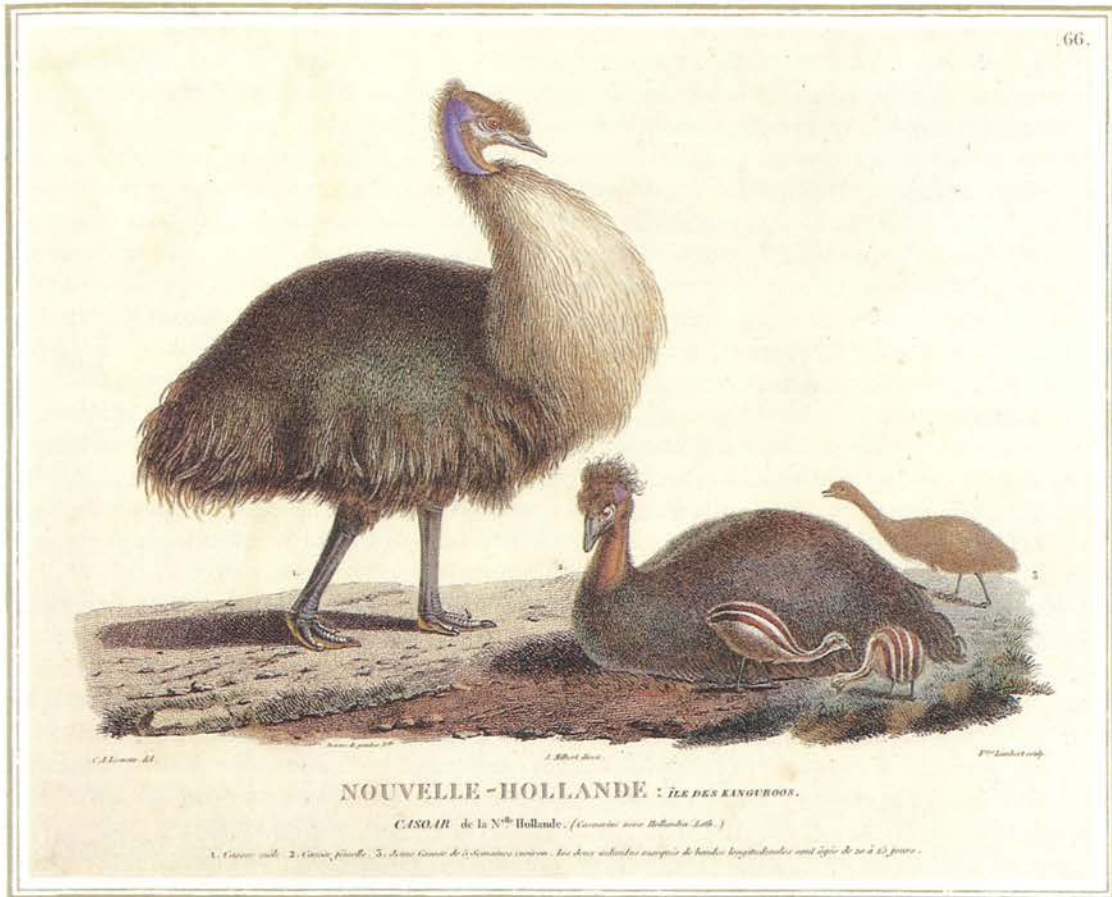
The first academic to bring the gospel of scientific history to Australia was G.C. Henderson, a student of Wood at Sydney who proceeded to Oxford in 1894 and read Modern History, a course of study that had passed into the hands of specialists since Wood had taken it a decade earlier. In 1902 Henderson took up the chair of modern history and English language at Adelaide. He was hardly a narrowly professional historian but he did bring an evangelical enthusiasm for the disciplinary innovations (and passed it on to A.C.V. Melbourne, the first of his students to achieve first class honours).

Henderson's own views on the discipline were delivered as a presidential address to a meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1911, the first at which historians constituted a section. His purpose was to show how the study of Australian history could be undertaken in a 'systematic and scientific way'. Previous attempts to tell the story of this country, he said, had been vitiated by bias. Rusden was singled out for writing not history but 'a brief extending over 2090 pages'. The task of the universities was therefore to train and equip students with an understanding of the techniques of research:

My argument may be summed up in a few words. The time has arrived when the history of the Commonwealth should be undertaken in a systematic and scientific way, and the institutions through which that might be done are the universities. The historical work done there at present is preparatory, and should find its fulfilment in research.

These views soon won general acceptance. Scott, for example, became an ardent exponent of the proposition that historians followed precise sequential procedures that ensured the authenticity of their results. First came an investigation of 'the truth about the past' by estimating facts and probabilities; then came a critical evaluation of the sources and step-by-step analysis, leading to a text which was completed with 'the virtuous habit of verification'.

The emphasis here fell on technique. Australian pronouncements on scientific history were



Some of the earliest European historical records of Australia were drawings of flora and fauna by parties of explorers. This family of emus was drawn by Frenchman C.A. Lesueur on Kangaroo Island.

more concerned with the establishment of facts than their interpretation, happier to contemplate the heaping up of properly researched theses and monographs than with searching for their larger meaning. Criticism was applied to the sources of evidence but seldom to the theoretical basis of the discipline, its historiographical principles and presuppositions. Even today, the scholarly writing of history in this country is characterised by a sober restraint; it tends to eschew speculation and to venerate ordinary common sense; it mistrusts abstractions and prefers factual reportage. Dr Watson merely carried these habits to excess when he wrote to Professor Wood towards the end of his editorial labours on the *Historical records of Australia* and boasted, 'I have now written twenty-one books but have never advanced a theory. At the same time I have discredited numberless theories and exploded many so-called facts'.

By 1945 Eris O'Brien was able to distinguish three phases in Australian historical scholarship. First came the chroniclers and controversialists who recorded and interpreted the past but 'were not scientific historians'. Next came the industrious analysts of the second half of the nineteenth century, but they too 'lacked the scientific approach and quoted annoyingly without a full identification of sources'. Finally there was the scientific school, characterised by thorough research, exactness in references and a 'sound unbiased interpretation of history'.

The surgeon Watson and the prelate O'Brien were among the rare exceptions that Henderson had allowed to his prediction that scientific history would be undertaken in the universities. Thirty-eight years later, when the president of the history section of ANZAAS declared that Australian history had finally attained maturity, the terms of approval he bestowed were 'professional', 'academic' and 'scholarly'. Historical writing had become a specialised discourse

written, he said, by graduates for graduates. Certainly, much writing took place outside the academy and some of it reached a respectable standard. 'If it is "professional", however, its conventions, methods of presentation and standards of evidence, are those set in universities.'

The professionalisation of Australian history proceeded slowly at first but with gathering momentum. Between the wars, with hardly more than a dozen full-time posts in all the universities, it was scarcely possible to embark on a career in the discipline except by patience and good fortune. Specialisation was out of the question. There was no full-year course in Australian history until 1927, no full-time lecturer in the subject until 1948. Opportunities for postgraduate study were few and there was no research institution until the Australian National University was established in 1947. Chances of publication were similarly restricted: none of the universities possessed a press until 1923 and there was no academic historical journal until 1940.

Until the end of World War II, therefore, the serious study of Australian history was restricted to small groups of honours students who might reach high standards—Keith Hancock thought their work comparable in quality, if not in quantity, to that of the honours schools of Oxford and Cambridge—but seldom continued beyond their graduation. Those who sought further training usually went overseas. No PhD in history was awarded by an Australian university until 1947; indeed, a listing of postgraduate research theses found that only 58 MAs were completed before 1945.

Yet 252 theses were written between 1945 and 1955, a level of productivity that was maintained over the next decade and increased in the one following. Today there are university history departments with more than one hundred postgraduate candidates on their books. The statistics for the publication of academic history books follow a similar trajectory: 11 for 1951–55, 33 for 1956–60, 63 for 1961–65 and 88 for 1966–70 (approximately two-thirds had Australian subjects). Similarly, the number of journal articles concerned with Australian history increased during the period as regional and specialist journals were established to cater for the growth in demand and supply. Religious, Aboriginal, migration, urban, sporting and military history were just some of the fields to emerge from within the history departments and develop their own concerns and procedures. Other specialisms, such as the history of education, art, law and medicine, developed within their parent disciplines, while economic history and the history of science were more commonly autonomous. Each of these subdisciplines produced its own increasingly esoteric literature.

These dramatic developments were made possible, of course, by the remarkable expansion of tertiary education after World War II. Whereas before the war there were fewer than twenty full-time history posts, by 1973 there were more than four hundred posts in mainstream history, probably another hundred practising elsewhere in the universities, and perhaps a further two hundred in other tertiary bodies. A clear career path had become established. The aspirant academic had first to take a sufficiently good degree to win a postgraduate scholarship; alternatively, apprenticeship as a tutor might be combined with part-time research. In either case his or her energies would be focused for a number of years on one major piece of writing. A doctorate, preferably leading to a monograph or published articles, was usually required to secure a permanent position. The requirements that the thesis be based on a substantial corpus of primary sources and make 'an original contribution to knowledge' had severely restrictive effects.

One critic lamented the 'desperate hunt for some subject which might conceivably be accepted and which no-one so far had thought of doing'. Another deplored how the 'ordeal by thesis' forced a narrow specialisation. These are perhaps harsh judgments. The thesis writer was expected to locate the research topic within the existing literature and there was no shortage of unworked topics. Nevertheless, a prudent candidate avoided the unconventional and anchored interpretative originality in a solid substratum of empirical data. The postgraduate thesis proceeded on the methodology of scientific history and enshrined a mode of precise, sober, cumulative knowledge.

It was inevitable that the procedures of academic scholarship, backed as they were by the resources, prestige and intellectual authority of the universities, would press in on other

practitioners. The process was a complex one and cannot be reduced to any simple differentiation of those within and without academia. There were, for example, historians who had worked outside universities and whose writings commanded respect: H.V. Evatt and J.V. Barry, R.W. Giblin and Eris O'Brien, Marjorie Barnard and Marnie Bassett—the list of first-rate independent scholars is far from complete. There was the indisputable achievement of the war histories, the World War I series largely written by C.E.W. Bean, the World War II series by Gavin Long, neither of whom possessed professional qualifications. There was the lawyer Sir John Ferguson, a great collector in the tradition of Mitchell and Dixson, whose *Bibliography of Australia* in seven volumes (1941–69) remains the starting point for bibliographic research. And there was M.H. Ellis, biographer of Macarthur and Macquarie, and scourge of academics. Right up to the 1950s, therefore, there was no hierarchy of professional and amateur. Indeed, *Historical studies* announced in its first issue that it was meant to serve both the 'specialist student' and the 'general reader', and its annual survey of 'Writings on Australian history' included both the specialist monograph and the commemorative local history.

Already, however, there was a tendency to pronounce judgment on the latter according to the standards of the former. More than this, there was a subtle but insistent pressure on all scholars to conform to the new, uniform standards. The process can be observed quite early in G.A. Wood's rejection, in a paper delivered to the Australian Historical Society in 1917, of George Collingridge's claims for the Portuguese discovery of Australia. While acknowledging the older man's erudition, Wood couched his refutation in the courteous but faintly patronising terms of a trained historian. 'It has come rather as a shock to me that so learned a man as Professor Wood has proved himself to be, should differ from me', confessed Collingridge. The irony, as Professor Spate has recently observed, is that the amateur, for all his interpretative excesses and the deficiencies of his exposition, was right. Subsequent examples of the same kind could be given but the case of labour history offers a particularly instructive example.

SCHOLARSHIP AND SOCIAL PURPOSE: THE CASE OF LABOUR HISTORY

The labour movement had long possessed a commemorative literature. It began as early as 1888 when John Norton, who would become notorious as the muckraking editor of *Truth*, solicited contributions from statisticians, politicians and trade union organisers, and grafted them onto an international survey to produce what he called a *History of capital and labour*. Norton wrote at the apogee of the Workingman's Paradise and insisted that whereas Old World historians were preoccupied with 'the pageants and pleasures of courts and courtiers', New World histories must be popular since in Australia 'it is working classes who are making history'.

Other writings in this celebratory tradition included the New South Wales parliamentarian George Black's *Labor in politics* (1893), the Melbourne Trades Hall secretary W.E. Murphy's *History of the eight hours movement* (1896) and the labour organiser and senator W.G. Spence's *Australia's awakening* (1909). Alongside them stood more critical commentators such as V.G. Childe who in *How Labour governs* (1923) subjected the objectives and methods of the mainstream labour movement to fundamental criticism, or H.V. Evatt who in his biography of an *Australian labour leader* (1940) pondered the dilemmas of the parliamentary reformer. We may include here also the massive *Labour and industry in Australia* in four volumes (1919) written by the New South Wales statistician Sir Timothy Coghlan after he went to London as agent-general in 1905. Coghlan wrote here in a somewhat different tone from that which characterised his earlier work. He was still a sympathetic critic of the labour movement, still concerned to show how it had benefited from material progress, but mindful in the light of recent reverses, of the stern laws of political economy. He wrote to Prime Minister Deakin in 1906 that 'I would have completed the book long ago but for my difficulty in determining the causes which gave workers so little in the way of comfort, in spite of the enormous progress of recent years'.

Finally, and above all, there was Brian Fitzpatrick's attempt to comprehend the forces that shaped Australian class relations and the historical experience of the working class. His two books of economic history (*British imperialism in Australia 1788–1833*, 1939, and *The British Empire in*

Australia, 1941), two extended essays (*The Australian people 1788–1945*, 1946, and *The Australian commonwealth*, 1956) and *A short history of the Australian labour movement* (1940) were all organised around his celebrated credo: ‘I have taken the view that the history of the Australian people is amongst other things the history of a struggle between the organised rich and the organised poor’.

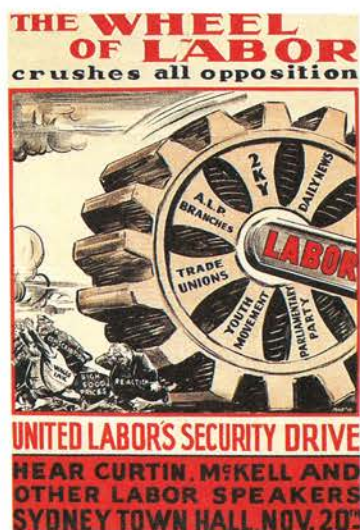
A graduate of the University of Melbourne where he studied under Scott, Fitzpatrick never obtained a permanent academic post. Both his politics and his erratic lifestyle were used to justify this injustice and when he submitted his two major works to the university to support an application for a doctorate of letters, the external examiners found them wanting. They condemned his faulty organisation, his uncritical use of evidence (‘he has depended too much on the *History of capital and labour*. This not very reliable book was published in 1888’) and his bias (‘the anxiety of the author to prove his thesis blinds his critical judgement’). Fitzpatrick returned a healthy contempt for conservative fact-grubbers. As a young man he had written a poem, ‘Against pedants’:

Thus shall I bare the mystery
Of sundry pedants’ history
The which my stark researches
Shall tumble from their perches.

For all they said
Was borrowed lore
Of books they’d read
The night before.

This antagonism did not weaken. ‘The origins of the people are not in the library’ was the title Fitzpatrick chose for an address he gave to ANZAAS in 1954. His own writings had to be fitted into various commitments: he was the founder and secretary of the Australian Council for Civil Liberties; he produced newsletters on current affairs, advised trade unions and the Labor party, and took part in the great campaigns of his day. But for all the hardships caused by the need to earn a living, there was an intimate relationship between his activities and his scholarship. His writings possess a protean quality, alternately disdaining the conventional apparatus of footnote references or using them to compile idiosyncratic running commentaries on people and events, but refusing steadfastly to conform to the academic norms of equable evenhandedness.

Consider, then, Fitzpatrick’s successors, the generation of left-wing historians who found places in the universities since the end of World War II. Lloyd Churchward, Miriam Dixon,



This poster advertising Labor speakers at the Sydney Town Hall demonstrates the growing faith in a united labour force. Poster by Martin, c1939.

NATIONAL LIBRARY

Eric Fry, Noel Ebbels, Robin Gollan, June Phillip, Ian Turner, Russel Ward—to name just some of them—shared Fitzpatrick’s sympathies with the labour movement and made it the subject of their postgraduate research. Although the expansion of higher education offered them opportunities that had been denied to their mentor, their careers were not untroubled by political discrimination. Nor did they seek a cloistered academic tranquillity—historical research was combined with, and in some cases delayed by, other more urgent commitments. The very formation of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History was an extension of these loyalties. Writing in the first issue of the society’s journal, *Labour history*, Gollan said that it would be of ‘immediate practical value to the labour movement’ properly to understand its own past, and of equal significance to redress the neglect of the working class in the intellectual culture. Labour history as a genre was a product of the meeting of the committed activist and the academy.

But could this delicate balance be maintained? Even in the postgraduate theses of this group, strains were apparent. Compare, for example, the sweep and immediacy of Ian Turner’s essays in cultural history with his monograph *Industrial labour and politics* (1975), which began life as a doctoral dissertation. Here already was the notion of a specialised academic discourse to which the initiate had to conform, a body of knowledge with its own language and conventions which subsumed labour history. The notion was taken further by more conservative academics, one of whom insisted in 1967 that labour history ‘is no more and no less than one of the institutional kinds of historical specialism ... it has no distinctive techniques, dogmas or permanent characteristics which distinguish it qualitatively from other kinds of history’. To see labour history thus was to freeze out those who could not participate in the institutional specialisation and would not conform to its proprieties. Thus Joe Harris, a Queensland trade unionist, noted in the preface to his *Bitter fight* (1970), a pictorial history of the early labour movement, that ‘some who have read the manuscript complain of the stridently partisan tone’. To their credit, the editors of *Labour history* have resisted pressures to turn their journal into a narrowly academic publication, but the overwhelming majority of its contributors are based in universities and it has many more readers there than in the unions.

GROWING UNEASE

The undesirable consequences of professionalisation were soon apparent. Even in the 1950s one professor lamented the ‘over-adherence to specialism, to professionalism, to scientism’, which led to ‘an arid professionalism bordering on pedantry’; another deplored the ‘meticulous investigation of small periods or problems’ at the expense of any larger vision. University historians, it was warned, would lose their larger audience if they continued to address themselves exclusively to their colleagues. They had lost the ability to entertain or instruct a reading public which turned instead to more popular writers who could help them make sense of the past, writers such as Robin Boyd, Donald Horne, Craig McGregor and J.D. Pringle.

By the early 1970s, when employment opportunities in the universities contracted sharply, there was a critical self-awareness of the structure of the profession itself, its insularity, hierarchical structure and stolid conformity to masculine, middle-class orthodoxies. In the very formation in 1974 of a professional body, the Australian Historical Association, this unease can be detected. Here, as elsewhere, the progress of historical scholarship in Australia conformed to European and North American precedents, though the diminutive size of Australian universities until the second half of the twentieth century meant that we tended to lag some way behind. Indeed, it was the truncated time-span of history’s full professional status that heightened the sense of certainty.

How could academics reach the wider audience? Hitherto the task had been performed by the short history, that distinctive hybrid of the narrative textbook and the interpretative essay, adequate in its coverage to serve for teaching purposes yet sufficiently succinct and vivid to appeal to the general reader. The genre began with the journalist A.W. Jose whose *Short history of Australasia* (1899) became a *History of Australia* (1914) and passed through fifteen editions.

Another journalist, Thomas Dunbabin, achieved minor success with *The making of Australasia* (1922).

Both were outstripped, however, by the professor of history at the University of Melbourne, Ernest Scott, whose *Short history of Australia* (1916) remained in print for more than half a century. The book's pedagogic intent is revealed by its chronological tables, lists of governors and ministries, and breaking down of chapters into classroom topics. Even so, Scott intended his *Short history* to answer 'such questions as might reasonably be put to it by an intelligent reader', and he offered that lay reader a strong storyline of national progress and development. The first edition appeared less than a year after the Gallipoli landing and proclaimed that 'This Short History of Australia begins with a blank space on the map and ends with the record of a new name on the map, that of Anzac'. Later editions simply continued the story.

By contrast, Keith Hancock's *Australia* (published in 1930 but written before the plunge into economic depression) was very much the product of a particular juncture. In it the young professor, who had recently returned to his country after several years abroad, found his compatriots to be living in a fool's paradise. The vantage point—that of a liberal lamenting the excesses of a stridently radical nationalism—was hardly new, but the book's impact was augmented by the crisis that had overtaken Australia by the time it appeared. Furthermore, as its author appreciated, it relied 'not upon specialist knowledge and technique, but upon an Australian's capacity to see his own country both sympathetically and critically, both at close view and in the perspective of history'.

The breadth of Hancock's perspective, the quality of his writing and the urgency of his concern combined to give the work a force that no other interpretative essay has approached. Neither G.V. Portus, *Australia, an economic interpretation* (1933), nor F.L.W. Wood, *A concise history of Australia* (1935), were able to rival it, though the American C. Hartley Grattan earned a deserved reputation for the shrewd transPacific insights of *Introducing Australia* (1942). Then the expansion of higher secondary and tertiary education encouraged a clutch of new short histories, each of which achieved its own interpretative coherence. In *Australia* (1952), R.M. Crawford revealed something of the spirit of postwar reconstruction and a confidence that he affirmed in his subsequent *An Australian perspective* (1960). Russel Ward expounded a radical and nationalist viewpoint in *Australia* (1965), while Douglas Pike wrote more conservatively of *Australia: the quiet continent* (1962). C.M.H. Clark foreshadowed his prophetic vision in *A short history of Australia* (1963) and A.G.L. Shaw eschewed all extremes in *The story of Australia* (1955).

From the mid-1960s, however, the genre fell from favour. To explain its demise it is tempting to point to the purely technical difficulty of mastering a vast and rapidly growing body of monographs and articles. Back in 1921 an academic in the full flush of scholarly enthusiasm had suggested that 'it is time that we stopped writing histories of Australia and wrote Australian history' in the form of specialist studies, since 'without such a series of detailed and exhaustive studies it is impossible to write any good survey of Australian history'. Forty years later the situation was so different that another professor was close to despair. The volume of research literature threatened to stifle the 'bold hypotheses that lent brilliance and distinction to the works of predecessors less encumbered by other men's researches'.

The expectation that the general historian could serve as the grand synthesiser was breaking down under the volume and heterogeneity of the raw material. Just as the interpretation of the past had become a specialist skill, so the mastery of particular topics and periods seemed to require the concentrated attention of an expert. In this spirit the Australian volume of the *Cambridge history of the British Empire* (1933) had been farmed out to a number of writers, and so too were *Australia: a social and political history* edited by Gordon Greenwood (1955) and *A new history of Australia* edited by Frank Crowley (1974). Similarly, the history slice volumes of the series *Australians: a historical library* were distributed among specialists.

The wider readership of the best short histories was served instead by freelance writers like Michael Cannon and R.M. Younger, and quite exceptional academics like C.M.H. Clark and Geoffrey Blainey. Clark, in the massive narrative *History of Australia* (1962–), and Blainey, with

his distinctive treatment of a wide range of subjects, cut across the grain of academic history. Both are conscious stylists, addressing themselves directly to the reader without the encumbrance of a weighty scholarly apparatus. Both are prophets, convinced that they have something to say. But the suspicion of Clark's and Blainey's colleagues towards their popularity tells us a good deal about the unease of academic history. Similarly, the flight from academia of Humphrey McQueen, among the gifted of the next generation, is symptomatic of professional constraints.

But the crisis of the profession goes deeper than this. It is not simply a matter of narrow specialisations and closed forms of communication. More fundamentally, many historians are no longer sure that they have anything to say. Along with the society in which they live, they have lost their sense of the imminence of the past. Since the modern age no longer feels itself to be living under the shadow of previous generations, it no longer expects to find guidance or enlightenment there. If Macaulay or Carlyle were nineteenth-century sages with an enormous following because they could make sense of the dramatic changes of their time, the same function in our time has been usurped by economists and sociologists whose explanations have no temporal dimension. If John West mobilised opinion against the transportation of convicts by writing its history, a modern penal reformer will use electronic media rather than print, and his arguments will be as immediate and transitory as the images that appear on the television.

For a time the academic historians actively resisted the demise of their discipline as a source of wisdom. An older generation that included Wood, Henderson and Portus—liberals all—had simply assumed the educational responsibilities of their station. By studying the growth of progress and freedom, students could be expected to emerge better citizens, morally as well as intellectually improved by their training. The early profession was characterised by its secularised social conscience. There were obvious precedents, given the ecclesiastical character of the English university system, for a man of religion to turn from the pulpit to the lecture theatre; the example of Portus illustrates that this did not necessarily entail a loss of faith. (Nor did the close relationship between the two end here: Hancock, Clark, Crowley and Blainey are all sons of the manse.) In most cases the transition redirected energies into a high-minded civic humanism.

The subsequent generation, whose formative experiences were war, depression and the crisis of democracy, could no longer assume these verities. R.M. Crawford, a student of Wood and the most responsive of the younger generation to these challenges, has recalled how, under the pressure of these circumstances,

The pleasing art of historical narration was at times elbowed out by the insistent demand that the past must somehow illuminate the present, that history must find answers to the problems that beset and bedevilled us. Analysis and discussion came more and more to replace the telling of a story . . .

On the eve of World War II and just two years after taking up the chair at Melbourne, Crawford delivered the presidential address to the history section of ANZAAS. It was a plea for a more rigorous historical method, not a determinist science of history because that would leave no room for freedom and moral judgment, but for a 'synoptic method' that could uncover the pattern of interrelationships within which societies exercised their freedom. Crawford's address grew out of the 'theory and method' class he conducted with his honours students, an innovation that was adopted in other universities. The introduction of theory and method brought a new self-awareness and sophistication to the work of Australian historians, the fruits of which were seen in the better writings of the 1950s and 1960s.

Crawford and his colleagues pursued these problems of historical knowledge further after the war. For a time Crawford was attracted to the proposition that historians should formulate general laws after the scientific model, though he accepted subsequently that he was here 'flogging a dead horse', and retreated to the view that history was a craft, rather than a science, the ultimate purpose of which lay in the preservation of essential values of good order and liberty, rationality and morality. This was the same humanist, civilising purpose that Greenwood had defended against the effects of professionalisation when he insisted that 'The ultimate value

of history lies in the begetting of wisdom and the acquisition of a cultivated mind'. And, as he recognised, it was already giving way to the sophisticated amorality of modern scholarship.

Most historians today are indifferent to larger historiographical problems, and the indignant reception accorded to Rob Pascoe's *The manufacture of Australian history* (1979) reflects their unease. Theory and method, where it is still taught to undergraduates, is but an artificial appendage to training in specialised areas with their own literatures, assumptions and techniques. It cannot resist the relativism engendered by the modern syllabus, nor can it check ingrained habits of destructive criticism. A graduate is therefore adept in showing how Smith has qualified Jones's reinterpretation of Evans on the local government reforms of the 1890s. As to the place of those events in the sweep of history, the basis on which they are being investigated or the reasons for doing so—here the training offers little guidance. Scholarship of this sort offers little room for the sense of critical engagement with the larger issues that Crawford kept in view. His tradition of liberal scholarship has passed.

So too has the broad interpretative framework with which most Australian historians worked up to the 1960s. This can be characterised as a progressive or radical nationalism, a belief that the main thrust of Australian history was the movement of its people—whose distinctive characteristics included a stoic resourcefulness, egalitarian 'mateship' and a distrust of wealth, status and authority—towards self-realisation. The generic description given to this viewpoint was 'the Whig interpretation of Australian history', thereby linking it with earlier records of national progress and suggesting that they all postulated an irresistible advance towards a predetermined destination.

Perhaps that puts it too strongly. The radical nationalist interpretation, as it took form and substance in the 1950s, served not as an orthodoxy but as a framework. It was simple, practical and coherent, in the best traditions of vernacular architecture. Like a woolshed, it lent itself to the use of local materials and allowed subsequent hands to build, skillion-fashion, onto the main structure without impairing its coherence. The skeleton was taken from the popular writers of the late nineteenth century. Later writers such as Vance and Nettie Palmer and Brian Fitzpatrick consolidated that rudimentary original structure; cultural historians like A.A. Phillips and Russel Ward extended it to take in ballads and popular literature; labour historians like Gollan and Turner showed how the organised working class was its heir and custodian; novelists like Katharine Susannah Prichard used it for historical fiction, or, like Marjorie Barnard, explored both fictional and non-fictional forms.

This radical nationalist account of Australian history was at once a celebration of past achievement and a yardstick for measuring further progress. But it came under attack from both right and left. In 1962 the conservative commentator Peter Coleman announced a 'Counter-revolution in Australian historiography'. Drawing on a number of recent publications, and especially on Manning Clark's 'Re-writing Australian history' (1956), he claimed that the 'standard radical leftist interpretation of Australian history' could no longer be sustained. Its denial of the contributions of the middle class, the churches, the universities and non-radical reformers was patently restrictive, its naive humanism was discredited and its assumption of unfolding social progress was confounded.

Even as this battle was joined, fresh assaults came from a young generation of radicals. Some said that the bearer of the radical tradition, the labour movement, was compromised fatally by its involvement in and preoccupation with exploitative class relations. Some dwelt on the less attractive aspects of the national character, the reliance on great and powerful friends to allay regional insecurity, the authoritarianism and ready recourse to violence, the xenophobia and racial discrimination. Some objected to the subordination of women within the received account and, more generally, to the overwhelmingly masculine character of Australian historiography—for even though there had been women historians since the beginning of the century, there had so far been no history of women. The publication of Miriam Dixson's *The real Matilda* (1975) and Anne Summers' *Damned whores and god's police* (1975) marks the beginning of what is undoubtedly an important challenge to conventional historiography.

Each of these concerns—class, race and gender—has generated a substantial literature over recent years, but it has not been easy to bring them together and reconstitute an overview. The predominant tone of this work has been profoundly pessimistic. It reveals such an extensive record of oppression that it is doubtful whether the past can provide guidance more fruitful than cautionary examples. Some would argue that the enterprise is in any case futile. They see the very project of national history as one that cannot withstand modern criticism, either because its categories ('nation', 'people', etc) dissolve in the acid-bath of critical analysis, or because they reject the very idea of unitary historical time. Nor have the conservative critics carried through their much-vaunted counter-revolution to produce a substantial interpretation of their own. They remain revisionists rather than expositors. In short, the very project of finding an Australian historical identity has fallen into discredit. A recent critical review of the search for a national character suggested that all such characterisations are only intellectual constructs. As its author puts it, there *is* no real Australia; there are only ideologues *Inventing Australia*.

PROSPECTS

Despite all these strictures, the invention, production and consumption of the Australian past proceeds apace. As part of a rapidly expanding tourist industry, it is presented in museums, preservation areas of old townships and the fanciful pretensions of new ones; Tasmanians are told that theirs is 'the history isle', Victorians are invited to 'hop into heritage'. As the subject of popular literature, television series and cinema (the overwhelming majority of successful Australian feature films during the 1970s were set in an age of innocence), it is the raw material of the entertainment industry. Institutional commemorations come thick and fast and no school centenary is complete without its dress-up celebration. Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and now the commonwealth have sponsored ambitious celebrations to commemorate their 150th and 200th anniversaries. Politicians from both major parties compete in ersatz Australianism. There is a sharp irony in the fact that as historians have retreated from national history, its influence as a cultural artefact has become increasingly strong.

It is all too tempting to poke fun at such ventures. The commercial undertakings foster a romanticised nostalgia, as sanitised as the bloodless floggings at Old Sydney Town. They reduce the past to an object of consumption. Like the pioneer legend they often invoke, official commemorations lean to a view that the past is free from misery or conflict. They reduce the past to a litany of affirmation. Similarly, when certain politicians cite the Eureka uprising as a statement of stern individualism and a precedent for tax resistance, or when mining magnates invoke nineteenth-century land settlement against environmentalism or Aboriginal land rights, they are doing something more than finding spurious precedents. They are making history into a tyrant. By invoking the strength of Australian history as an outside force which dominates the present by an authority derived from an irrevocable past, they leave no alternative but submission.

To rest the matter there would be to accept the continuous antagonism between academic and vulgar, and to leave unchallenged the assumption that the latter kind of history is foisted, ready-made, on to consumers. In fact there is considerable evidence of a genuine and autonomous interest in the past, of a popular memory which exists independently of and often in opposition to the dominant memory. The popular memory assumes various forms. It is tapped by oral history, especially in the community-based projects that have burgeoned recently. It is present in family history whose recent popularity is surely one of the most extraordinary manifestations of modern rootlessness. It animates the poetic imagination of Les Murray and it finds lyrical expression in the writing of Eric Rolls. But mostly the popular memory is left to play on the restricted range of commercial and institutional material that is put before it. There is here an enormous opportunity for historians to enlarge and enrich the practice of their discipline. Clearly, many will continue to work along existing lines of development and we may expect to learn from their specialist researches. Others, surely, will accept the challenge to trace the connections between the past and the present, and to give shape and meaning to life in this country.

I RESOURCES FOR AUSTRALIAN STUDIES



Bookplate incorporating embossed lettering, by Lloyd Rees, 1978.

Private libraries have played a significant part in preserving Australia's historical records. Private collections of books and documents, such as that presented by David Scott Mitchell to the State Library of New South Wales, form the basis of many state collections of historical resources.

PAT CORRIGAN

AREA STUDIES, defined as the examination of the total environment of a geographic or political area, are relatively new in the academic world. Borne on the wave of the postwar spread of higher education, the quest for a reassessment of the universities' objectives brought with it a demand for less esoteric approaches to knowledge and a craving for 'relevance'—though few would have been able to define what relevance really meant. In that climate of educational opinion, area studies were seen as a suitable discipline, representing a positive and deliberate endeavour to explain the constitution and behaviour of people and institutions, as well as the origin and significance of the artefacts of an area, while trying to ensure that sight of the whole was not lost through an overemphasis on detail.

Various difficulties have to be overcome if area studies are to have solid foundations, and for the traditional agents of conservation—librarians, archivists, museum and gallery curators—the demands of this new approach to academic research present considerable challenge. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of whether these agents should be, above all, custodians and preservers of the tangible evidence of the past or whether they should be active facilitators of research, there can be no doubt that the 'new teaching' and the modernist approach to research require from them a wider awareness of evidence than was needed when academic and scholarly activities were based on more traditional methods.

Librarians, archivists and museum and gallery curators are now obliged to extend their professional horizon and cultivate at least an awareness of each other's field of expertise. They must be able to determine what type of historical and cultural evidence is held in each repository. An example of this approach would be a request to provide literary and material evidence for a history of transport in Australia, a subject that requires documents from government and private archives, literature from libraries holding Australian books and journals, and a range of technical equipment, whose design and refinement determined the progress of the transport industries.

This section presents an overview of the rich resources held by archives, libraries, museums and galleries for Australian studies. There are already a number of published guides describing the holdings of these four types of institutions, but none attempts to deal with more than one kind of repository at a time. Obviously this prevents the student of Australian studies from recognising the vital interrelationship of the multiform evidence for an understanding of Australian life and customs, history, economics and politics, agriculture, science and medicine, religion, leisure and sport. We have therefore brought together appropriate comments and descriptions in this volume.



Abraham Lincoln, Kangaroo hunt. Pencil and wash from a sketchbook, Australian sketches, 1838–44. The bizarre colonial sport of hunting kangaroos with dogs is described in detail alongside this drawing. Lincoln's sketchbook was a personal record of his travels in New South Wales.

MITCHELL LIBRARY