

Biography Footnotes:

the newsletter of the National Centre of Biography

no 5, 2010

From the Director's Desk

Congratulations to all the ADB authors who were recognised in Australia Day Honours.

- Hon. Justice Bruce Debelles AO
- James Oswald Fairfax AC
- Dr Susan Graham-Taylor AM
- Prof. Jenny Gregory AM
- Hon. David Levine AO
- Donald Knowles Richardson OAM
- Hon. Justice Lloyd Waddy AM
- Margaret Helen White OAM



NCB Director, Melanie Nolan

Magarey Prize for Biography: Five of the six writers short-listed for the 2010 Magarey prize for biography are ADB authors. Congratulations to all the contenders: Ann Galbally, *A Remarkable Friendship: Vincent van Gogh and John Peter Russell*, Jenny Hocking, *Gough Whitlam: A Moment in History*, Jacqueline Kent, *An Exacting Heart: The Story of Hephzibah Menuhin*, Brenda Niall, *The Riddle of Father Hackett* and Jill Roe, *Stella Miles Franklin: A Biography*. Jill and Jacqueline also wrote the ADB entries on their respective subjects.

South Australian Premier's Award: Further congratulations to Jill Roe on winning the 2010 South Australian Premier's Award for non-fiction for *Stella Miles Franklin: A Biography*.

Book Launch: The NCB is hosting the launch of Jim Davidson's book, *A Three-Cornered Life: The Historian W.K. Hancock* (UNSW Press, 624 pp, \$59.95) at the ANU in July. As many of you know, Sir Keith Hancock was one of the founders of the ADB and the inaugural chairman of its Editorial Board. Jim also wrote the ADB entry on Hancock.

Biographical Register: As we prepare to launch the NCB's Obituaries Australia website I am reminded that we still have spare copies of our two-volume *Biographical Register 1788-1939*, published in 1987. The *Biographical Register* contains brief details and citations about 8100 Australians who died prior to 1939. If you would like a copy they are going free of charge - provided you collect them from our office. Give us a call on 6125 2676 or email adb@anu.edu.au to arrange a time to pick them up.

International Women's Day Centenary: The NCB has made a joint application with the Queensland arts body, Artisan, for funding to stage a travelling exhibition in 2011 celebrating the centenary of International Women's Day. One hundred of Australia's most talented women jewellers will be invited to create brooches celebrating the lives of

100 Australian women who have broken the barriers in the arts, sciences, humanities and sport. The NCB will provide short biographies of the nominated women and will develop a web presence on our site for the exhibition, including thematic essays and relevant digitised material.

ARC Applications: The NCB is submitting two LIEF applications to the Australian Research Council this year:

- (1) The 'Australian Biographical Corpus' is a collaboration between the NCB, Sydney eScholarship, University of Sydney Library, University of Sydney, AustLit, Dictionary of Sydney and the NLA. The partnership aims to create a major infrastructure base so that researchers can discover, explore and derive relationships across rich primary sources of content including biography, memoirs, journals and life writing.
- (2) 'Bob Hawke: Creating a National Online Prime Ministerial Research Facility' is a collaboration between the NCB, University of South Australia, ANU Archives, National Archives of Australia and the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. The partners aim to create an electronic research hub focused on the career of the former Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. They will be joined in the project by experts in politics and history, from the University of Adelaide, La Trobe University, the University of Western Australia and the Menzies Centre (London) who will create the interpretative framework to trigger research innovation.

Biography Indexing: We have received an email from Terri Anne Mackenzie who is a professional book indexer with a special interest in biography. As well as holding a Bachelor of Arts degree from Monash University with majors in Music and Russian, Terri has a Graduate Diploma in Librarianship, and a Graduate Certificate in Applied Media. Her rates are \$45.00 per hour (GST free) or she can work out a price per page. Terri can be contacted at terrianne@bigpond.com

Life Writing. Published by Routledge, and available both in hardcopy and online, *Life Writing* is one of the leading journals in the field of biography and autobiography and includes both scholarly articles and critically informed personal narrative. You can preview a sample copy of the journal at <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t762290978~tab=sample~db=all> You will need to set up a username and password with Informaworld to access the journal, but the link to do this is on the *Life Writing* website and the process is straightforward.

Who's Writing What: Those of you working on biographical projects are invited to add details about your work on our new 'Who's Writing What' site at <http://ncb.anu.edu.au/node/add/whos-writing-what> . The aim of the site is to facilitate contact between those doing similar research and to help avoid any duplication of projects.

Who's Looking At What. We are observing that a growing number of people are turning to the ADB for biographical information after having their interest piqued by a current event or TV program. The number of people searching the ADB for Mary Mackillop, for example, increased dramatically in December and January following the

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Pope's announcement that she was to become Australia's first saint. Such was the increase that Mackillop toppled Caroline Chisholm as the number one search time in those months. This was the first time, since the ADB went online in July 2006, that Chisholm missed out on the top spot. Chisholm was toppled again in April, this time by the notorious crime figure, George Freeman, one of the main characters in the TV series 'Underbelly'. The 'Wild White Man', William Buckley, who was the subject of a TV documentary on the ABC in April, was that month's second most popular search term.

NCB Staff – Comings: The NCB's new deputy director, Dr Paul Arthur, joined the staff on 1 April. Dr Samuel Furphy began his three-year post-doctoral fellowship on 12 April. As well as editing ADB entries, Sam is writing a collective biography of the members of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines (1859-1886). The NCB's new Research Fellow, Dr Rani Kerin, will take up her position in November. We are also in the process of appointing a full-time computer programmer who will work on planned enhancements of ADB Online and the development of E-Research projects. The ad for this position is on page 15 of the newsletter and can also be found electronically at <http://jobs.anu.edu.au/PositionDetail.aspx?p=1241>

NCB Staff – Goings: Dr Gail Clements is retiring on 2 June 2010. Gail joined the ADB in 2000 as desk editor for the 'smaller' states and was appointed acting managing editor in 2008.

Vale Jim Griffin: It is with great regret that we announce the death of Jim Griffin on 9 May. Jim, the husband of former ADB staffer, Helga Griffin, was a great supporter of the ADB and wrote 21 entries, including the controversial entries on Archbishop Daniel Mannix and John Wren.

Forthcoming Events

September 2010 'Using Lives' workshop. Dr Nicholas Brown is organising a week-long, intensive, residential postgraduate workshop on 'Using Lives' in conjunction with the NCB, the Humanities Research Centre (ANU) and the Centre for Historical Research (National Museum of Australia). Contact Nick for more details at nicholas.brown@anu.edu.au

24 September 2010 'The Life of Information' is an interdisciplinary symposium, organised by the NCB, focusing on online dictionaries, encyclopedias and collections. The symposium seeks to better understand the dynamic nature of these large information resources, asking which formats for recording and presenting the past are likely to survive the digital revolution to become long-lasting records of place, culture and identity. Presenters will discuss leading Australian and international projects. Confirmed keynote speaker, Willard McCarty, is Professor of Humanities Computing at King's College, London. Contact Paul Arthur for more information at paul.arthur@anu.edu.au

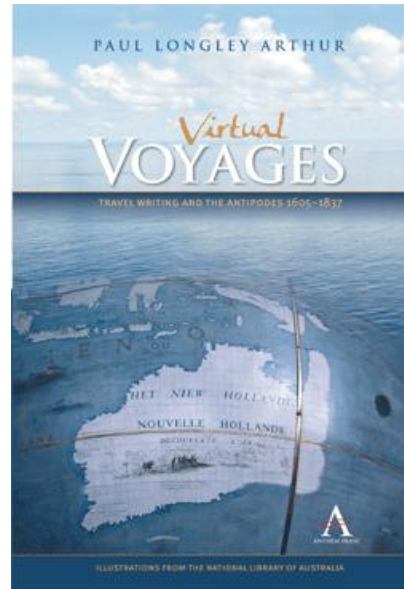
4-5 November 2010 'The Seven Dwarfs and the Age of Mandarins'. The NCB, with the assistance of John Nethercote, an authority on public service and parliamentary issues, is organising a two-day conference on the rise of the powerful Commonwealth public service mandarins following the Second World War. Contact Sam Furphy for more details at samuel.furphy@anu.edu.au

Book Launch - Virtual Voyages

You are invited to join us in celebrating the launch of Dr Paul Arthur's book, *Virtual Voyages: Travel Writing and the Antipodes 1605-1837* (Anthem Press, 2010) in the Conference Room at the National Library of Australia on Tuesday 8 June at 4 pm.

Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton AO, Professor Melanie Nolan and Professor Tom Griffiths will engage in a conversation about voyages, both real and imaginary, to the 'great south land' before the book is launched by Geoffrey Bolton.

RSVP: bookings@nla.gov.au or (02) 6262 1271



About the Book

Virtual Voyages is a fascinating account of the discovery of the elusive 'great south land' told through the literature of imaginary voyages. Written at the height of the era of European maritime exploration, these bizarre and captivating tales, with their wildly imaginative visions of antipodean inversion and strangeness, reveal a hidden history of attitudes to colonisation. By exposing the relationship between myth and reality in the antipodes, the book casts new light on the power of fiction to influence history.

About the Author

Paul is the new Deputy Director of the National Centre of Biography and Deputy General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography

His interests in the antipodes, travel literature and the early novel began in the 1990s when he was a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Western Australia. Research fellowships at Murdoch University (2004-07), and Curtin University (2007-09) enabled him to do further research and complete the writing of *Virtual Voyages*.

During 2009 Paul was a visiting fellow at two international centres – Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University, USA (teaching the seminar course 'Writing History with New Media'), and HUMlab, the digital humanities centre at Umeå University, Sweden.

Paul has written widely on the history of technology and media, digital culture and identity, and new methods for humanities research. His forthcoming book, *History and New Media*, considers the digital future of historical studies, arguing that user navigation is replacing traditional kinds of narration – with major consequences for how we will know the past. A new book project, with the working title of *Digital Biography: Lives Online*, explores the impact of technology on identity, memory and life writing. He is currently editing a collection of essays, with Geoffrey Bolton, on the history of Fremantle, Western Australia, and is guest editor for upcoming issues of the Routledge journal *Life Writing* (on 'Recovering Lives') and Canada's museum studies journal *Material Culture Review* (on 'Virtual Exhibitions').

NCB Digitisation Program

The National Centre of Biography has been awarded a \$100,000 Major Equipment Grant from the Australian National University to purchase a state-of-the-art Guardian camera/scanner.

This is the same camera that the National Library of Australia has been using to digitise the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Sydney Morning Herald* as part of its newspaper digitisation project. As well as being able to easily and safely handle oversize and fragile material, the camera's sensitive lens provides over 95% accuracy for optical character recognition.



Guardian camera

The Guardian is as massive as it looks. At almost 3m tall and weighing in at 360kg it is too large to fit in any of the NCB's offices so will be housed in a dedicated room in the ANU Archives.

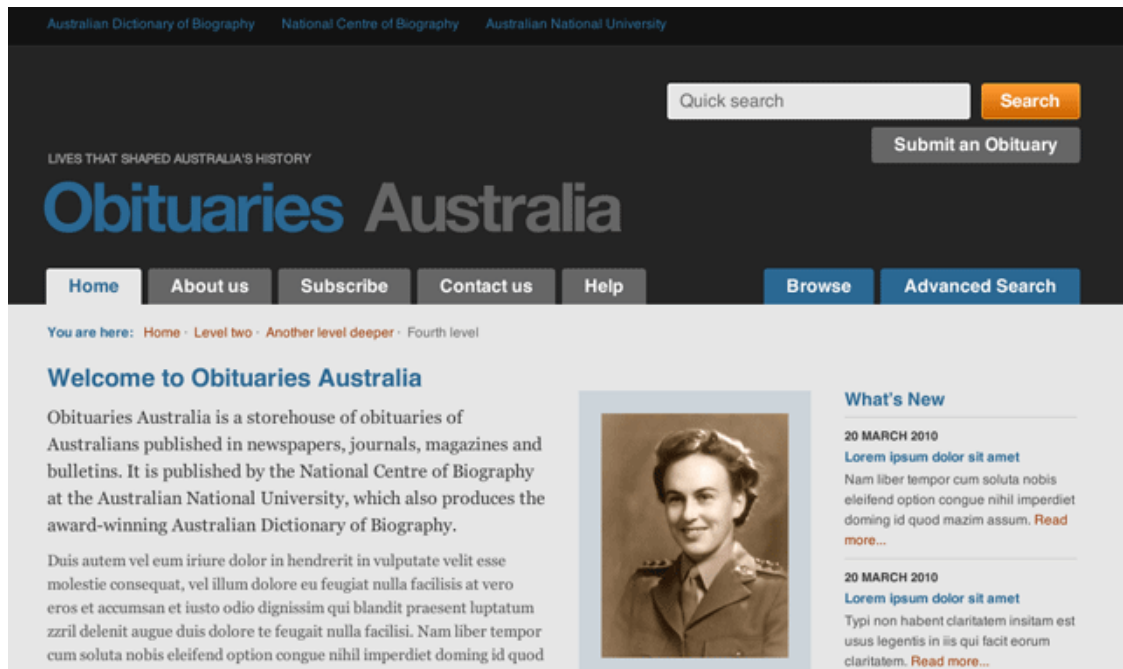
One of its first jobs will be digitising the ADB's 12,000 working files. Subject to copyright and privacy concerns this material will eventually be linked to ADB entries. We will also be digitising – again, mindful of copyright restraints – any other relevant material mentioned in ADB entries, as well as the wealth of unpublished papers, maps, theses, archival files etc... generated by ANU scholars over the years that are relevant to ADB entries.

The Guardian will also be used to digitise obituaries, and any associated material such as unpublished autobiographies, eulogies and memoirs, for Obituaries Australia.

Another project we are investigating is digitising the many collective biographies that have been written over the years that are now out of copyright. These include the marvellous *Australasians Who Count in London and Who Counts in Western Australia*, published in 1913 by Mrs. Leonard W. Matters; *The Centenary Gift Book* of profiles of women published by the Victorian Women's Centenary Council in 1934; the elegant but very confusing two-volume *Australian Men of Mark* (seven known editions of volume two were published without any distinguishing bibliographic characteristics such as different edition numbers) published in 1889 and the various state encyclopedias, with their wealth of biographical portraits, published at the turn of the twentieth century.

The NCB will be taking delivery of the Guardian camera in the middle of May. When not being used on NCB projects, it will be made available for other digitisation projects within the ANU.

Obituaries Australia



The National Centre of Biography's new obituaries database finally has a name, a web design and over 300 obituaries.

The project has come a long way since it was proposed last year. Then the idea was simply to transform the Biographical Register, which we have been maintaining since 1954, from an 'in-house' to an 'online' database so that all researchers could easily access the records.

We have since narrowed our focus in that we will now concentrate on collecting published obituaries. We have also become much more ambitious. Rather than just being a citation database, Obituaries Australia will display the full text of published obituaries. The obituaries will also be indexed using the same fields as those in the ADB so that, in time, those searching the ADB will also be drawn to results in Obituaries Australia and vice versa.

Although it is still in its pilot stage, and not yet accessible online, the response to Obituaries Australia from family members, from whom we have sought obituaries and associated material, has been overwhelmingly positive. Indeed the support has been so overwhelming that we have decided to involve the public in the project by inviting them to submit scanned copies of obituaries, that are now out of copyright, and to do some of the indexing, thus saving NCB staff a considerable amount of time.

People will also be encouraged to send us other biographical material, including up to 10 images showing the subjects at various stages of their lives, as well as unpublished autobiographies, memoirs and eulogies which we will digitise, using our new state-of-the-art Guardian camera/scanner (described elsewhere in the newsletter), and link to the obituaries. We have already started gathering some of this material. The son of one of our subjects, a World War II Sandakan prisoner-of-war camp survivor, has sent us his father's unpublished autobiography, which we will digitise and make available through

Obituaries Australia. Another of his sons has painted a number of portraits of his father – one of which one the Gallipoli Art Prize - which he is allowing us to use on the site.

As a further aid to researchers we will be linking obituaries to significant digitised biographical material such as war service records, ASIO files and oral history interviews held by libraries, archives and museums. Obituaries will also be linked to the National Library of Australia's 'Trove' search facility to reveal any items about/by the subjects held in the nation's libraries and in the Australian newspapers that have so far been digitised.

We believe that, in time, Obituaries Australia will be a valuable research tool for anyone undertaking biographical research on Australians. Not only will it enhance existing ADB entries, it will assist the NCB in developing prosopographical projects and research projects on embedded relationships and the associational life of Australians. It will also serve the purpose, as the Biographical Register which it replaces has served, of aiding ADB Working Parties in the selection of individuals to be included in the ADB. And it will be of enormous benefit to both ADB staff and authors when we begin the mammoth task of rewriting/revising existing entries and adding 'missing persons' to the ADB.

The NCB is particularly grateful to John Farquharson for allowing us to publish his collection of obituaries for the pilot stage of the project. John has had a long association with the ADB, both as an author and a member of the Commonwealth Working Party. A former political journalist and deputy editor of the *Canberra Times*, John is considered to be one of Australia's finest obituarists.

Obituaries Australia will be launched in August.

First Obituary Published in an Australian Newspaper

James Bloodworth, Superintendent of Builders, holds the 'honour' of having the first obituary to be published in an Australian newspaper. It was published in the *Sydney Gazette* on 25 March 1804. In many ways it is fitting that James should have that honour as not only was he a former convict who made 'good' but he arrived in the First Fleet. His conviction was for stealing one game cock and two hens.

DEATH

On Wednesday last died, generally lamented, Mr. James Bloodworth, for many years Superintendent of Builders in the Employ of Government. He came to the Colony among its first inhabitants in the year 1788, and obtained the Appointment, from his exemplary conduct, shortly after his arrival; the first house in this part of the Southern hemisphere was by him erected, as most of the Public Buildings since have been under his direction. To lament his loss he has left a Widow and five Children, the youngest an infant now only one week old; and the complaint which terminated in his dissolution was supposed to proceed from a severe cold contracted about two months since.

The attention and concern which prevailed at the internment of the deceased were sufficient testimonies of the respect with which he filled, and the integrity with which he uninterruptedly discharged the duties of Public Trust during so long a period. His Excellency was pleased to order that the Funeral should be provided for at the Public Expense, and to show other marks of attention to so good a Servant of the Crown.

Four in the afternoon of Friday being as the wish of the widow appointed for the Funeral, the Relics of the deceased were at that hour removed from his house in South Street, and conveyed to the place of interment, attended by a great number of friends, among whom were most of the Sydney Loyal Association, in which he had been appointed Sergeant.

Opposite to his old residence a Procession was formed, which moved in the following order.

12 of the Loyal Association, arms reversed

Sergeant of the Association

Drum muffled & Fife

THE BIER

Two Sons, chief Mourners followed by an Infant Daughter,

Fourteen Female Mourners,

Twenty-four Male ditto

A number of respectable inhabitants in Rank

The Non-commissioned Officers of the New South Wales Corps

And a crowd of spectators

When near the Burial Ground the Association were obliged to file off, for the accommodation of the friends of the deceased, and the populace, who were become [sic] very numerous; and when the remains were disposed approached the grave and performed Military Honours.

You can also view this obituary on the National Library's digitised newspapers website at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article626104>

Dear ADB

Among the hundreds of names listed under ‘Acknowledgements’ in the printed volumes of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* one name, in particular, stands out: R. J. M. Tolhurst. He’s listed in volumes 13 to 15. For seven years, from 1989 until 1995, Richard Tolhurst wrote almost monthly from England to John Ritchie, the general editor of the ADB, with a list of errors that he had detected in ADB entries. He wrote so many letters that in the end staff had to create a special folder just to store them – along with Ritchie’s replies.

Reading the letters you can see the bond that formed between the two men. Ritchie even penned a tribute to Mr Tolhurst (they always addressed each other formally) in the ADB’s newsletter of September 1990, describing him as the ADB’s ‘most prolific discoverer of corrigenda’. Staff had a great fondness for him too. His letters were circulated among them and on one a staffer wrote, ‘No errors reported! Hooray!’ It became almost a sport amongst staff to prove Mr Tolhurst wrong. But he never was. His depth of knowledge of Australian history and dates and quirky facts was phenomenal.

There were a few other regular correspondents in those days – Barry Jones and Gough Whitlam being the most notable – and, of course, the mysterious man in Greece who used to write after the release of each new volume with his list of detected errors.

Now that we are online we get a lot more correspondence, of course. None are quite as erudite as our former letter writers. Many do not seem to be even sure of what the ADB is. A significant number, for example, ask us to value a painting they have acquired by an artist who has an ADB entry, or to value signed editions of books by authors in the ADB. One even asked what the fountain pen he had inherited, which had originally belonged to a famous person in the ADB, might be worth. We’ve noted on the ‘Contact’ page that we are not valuers – but they still write.

Descendants are another large category of today’s correspondents. Many write to dispute our spelling of various ancestors’ names. These queries are always difficult to resolve as the spelling often varies depending, particularly in the 1800s and early 1900s, on which certificate you are looking at. Then there are the family members who don’t like the criticisms ADB authors might make of their ancestors and demand that we delete the offending sentences. We can’t, of course. As long as they are considered, authors have the right to make their own judgements about the subjects of their entries. Other descendants seem to think we are a genealogical site and ask for information about distant relatives of ADB subjects. One person wondered if we knew the maiden name of the wife of our subject’s grandson.

In the last few years we have begun to receive emails from people claiming to have been sexually abused by various people who have received glowing assessments in ADB entries. These are the most distressing emails. There is little we can do, however, if there have been no court cases. In one case, where an inquiry did reveal sexual and physical abuse to have been perpetrated at the institution run by the subject of the ADB entry, we did include an addendum to his entry stating that fact.

When we went online in 2006 we braced ourselves for an onslaught of emails from children wanting us to do their homework. Thankfully, this hasn’t happened though we do get the occasional request for help. The more brazen include the specific questions

they want us to answer. A favourite email from this group came from a 13-year-old girl who thanked us for our wonderful site. She had used it to help write an essay for which she had received an A+. It was the first time she had received such a high mark, she wrote. We chuckled as we wondered how much text she had lifted straight from the ADB.

Occasionally we are able to assist people in unexpected ways. While trying to sort out some misinformation that an emailer's great aunt, the subject of an ADB entry, had spread about herself, we acquired the death certificates of the woman's grandmother and great grandmother and, as a friendly gesture, forwarded the details in them to her. She wrote back thanking us profusely, saying the information had brought tears to her eyes. Her ancestors' causes of death had confirmed her suspicion of an inherited disease that had passed down the generations.

Quite a number of people write seeking permission to reproduce ADB entries. We always say yes, providing the entries are fully annotated and are reprinted only in newsletters and not on the web. A few have sought to reprint the entries in quite novel ways. A railways union wanted to frame the entries on their comrades and hang them in their conference room. A science library wanted to use ADB entries of scientists as decorations on book stands.

Some emails come as a complete surprise. Like the one from the Executive Sous Chef at Flemington Racecourse. He was looking for menus that might have been in vogue 100 years ago at the running of the first Melbourne Cup. How on earth did he find his way to us, we wondered. The answer is obvious. A search of 'Melbourne Cup' on google led him to the numerous jockeys, punters, bookies, racecourse officials, and horse breeders, owners and trainers in the ADB who have been associated with that famous race. We even have an 'unofficial' ADB entry on the Melbourne Cup's most famous winner, Phar Lap. (see *Biography Footnotes*, no 3, 2009).

Dealing with correspondence is never a waste of time. Now that we're aware of the Melbourne Cup's centenary we are looking for someone to write a thematic essay about the race for the ADB website. Any takers should email us!

Biography Reading Group

The NCB's Biography Reading Group meets at the Australian National University on the last Thursday of each month. Places are limited but, if you have a particular interest in attending any of the sessions, please contact us at ncb@anu.edu.au

This year the group is considering some of the basic questions about biography:

- Is biography fiction?
- Who deserves to have a biography written of them?
- What details are appropriate to be included in a biography?
- Is it possible to know with certainty the inner life of another?
- What are the moral or ethical responsibilities of biographers towards subjects, social sensitivities and the truth?

One of Australia's best-known authors, Kate Grenville, started off the year's discussion at February's meeting by talking about the central place of factual events in her novels.

Last month, Susan Varga spoke about the boundary between fiction and non-fiction. After writing the awarding winning biography *Heddy and Me* (1994), Susan published a novel, *Headlong* (2009), which covered some of the same subject matter.

Brenda Niall will join as guest speaker at the next meeting of the BRG on **27 May**. Brenda has written a number of biographies, including *Seven Little Billabongs: The World of Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce* (1979), *Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter, Diarist, Pioneer* (1994) and *The Boyds: A Family Biography* (2002) and the biography of a 'live' subject, *Judy Cassab: A Portrait* (2005). Her most recent book, *The Riddle of Father Hackett: A Life in Ireland and Australia* (2009), which combines memoir with public history, has been shortlisted for the 2010 Magarey Medal for Biography. She has also written the autobiographical *Life Class: The Education of a Biographer* (2007). Brenda will discuss how she constructs a life, structures a book and teases out the 'things' that sustain a biography.

24 June: Discussion of Joan Schenkar's Biography, The Talented Miss Highsmith Discussion Leader: Chris Wallace

Patricia Highsmith (1921-1995) was a crime fiction writer specialising in psychological thrillers. She was bisexual and never had children, and has been the subject of a number of biographies recently which concentrate on her psychological profile. These include Andrew Wilson, *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith* (2003) and Joan Schenkar, *The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and the Serious Art* (2009). Chris Wallace, who is undertaking a PhD at the National Centre of Biography, will lead the discussion on why a biography should be written on Highsmith? Why another biography?

29 July: Cross-disciplinary perspectives on biography Guest Speaker: Dr Willa McDonald

A senior lecturer at Macquarie University, Willa's research interests are creative non-fiction/literary journalism, biography and memoir, journalism, ethics, travel writing, place and nature writing, race and the media. In 2007 she co-edited the anthology *Telling Stories in Journalism and Non-Fiction*, a work designed to reflect upon the process of writing. Her biography, *Warrior for Peace: Dorothy Auchterlonie Green*

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(2009) will be of particular interest to our PhD students because it started as Willa's own doctoral thesis.

26 August: The Relationship Between Ordinariness and Prominence

Guest Speaker: Judith Brett

Professor Judith Brett is well-known for her studies of prominent politicians, including *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (1992) which won the 1993 Ernest Scott Prize, the 1993 Victorian Premier's Prize for Australian Studies and shared the 1993 New South Wales Premier's Prize for non-fiction. She is currently writing a biography of Alfred Deakin. Judith has also written a book with Anthony Moran called *Ordinary People's Politics* in 2006. She said that 'writing about ordinariness in today's political climate is a fraught enterprise. Since John Howard's election and the rise and fall of Pauline Hanson, being ordinary has become a contested political commodity'. Judith will discuss the relationship between ordinariness and prominence.

30 September: The Public/Personal Divide

Guest Speaker: Tim Rowse

Professor Tim Rowse's biography of *Nugget Coombs* (2002) has been described as a 'fine, intellectual biography'. As he notes in his acknowledgements, Tim set out to write about the public life, 'Coombs' deposited papers did not include items that reveal what he considered to be his private life... my consent to Coombs' public/private boundary restrained me from exploring that theme very far. The resulting book is more impersonal than most readers of biographies would wish'. Tim will discuss the writing of a public life.

28 October: Coming Closest to Knowing the Inner life of Another and Writing the Definitive Biography

Guest Speaker: Mark McKenna

Charles Manning Hope Clark has been described as Australia's most famous historian. In 1999, Stephen Holt wrote *A Short History of Manning Clark*. Brian Matthews' biography *Manning Clark: A Life* was published in 2008. Associate Professor Mark McKenna's biography of Clark is due to be published this year. Mark will discuss writing the 'definitive biography'.

25 November: Ethics: Treading Softly and Compassionate Truth

Panel Discussion: Niki Francis and Kim Rubenstein

Biographers face a range of ethical issues. The most difficult is how to protect the academic integrity of a biographical project against pressure to conform to the views of the family and friends of the subject. What does one do, in the worst case scenario, if a family, which had been co-operating with a biographer, withdraw complete or partial support for the project near the end of it?

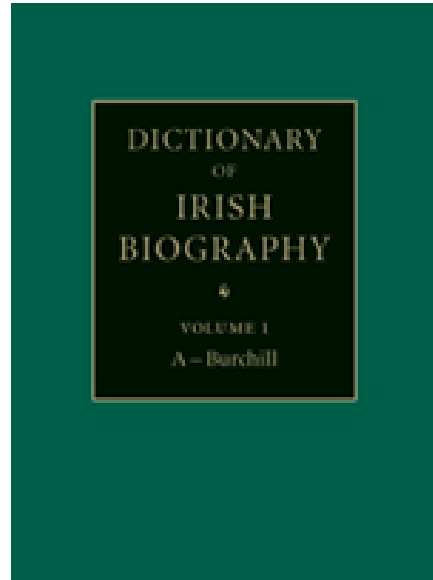
Niki Francis is completing a PhD, on the artist Rosalie Gascoigne, at the National Centre of Biography.

Professor Kim Rubenstein is writing a biography of the former Principal of Presbyterian Ladies College Melbourne, Joan Montgomery.

Dictionary of Irish Biography

The National Centre of Biography is pleased to note the publication, last year, of the nine-volume *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Also available online as a subscription website, the *DIB*'s 9014 entries, ranging from 200 to 15,000 words, cover 9,700 lives from the 5th Century to those who died in 2002.

The *DIB* has had a long gestation. As early as the 1930s the *Irish Times* began calling for the publication of a 'worthy' dictionary of Irish biography, to be funded by the government and produced by 'all the scholarship in the country'. Twenty years later the National Library of Ireland began preliminary work on the dictionary, but had to shelve the project for lack of funding.



The Irish Committee of Historical Sciences was the next to take up the challenge, with calls for a biographical dictionary appearing regularly on their agendas in the 1970s. In the 1980s the Royal Irish Academy undertook a pilot scheme to investigate the resources that would be needed for the project and, in the early 1990s, began employing several part-time staff, as money could be spared, to begin work on volume one.

A breakthrough came in 1994 with Cambridge University Press's offer to cover the production costs of the *DIB* provided all the volumes were published simultaneously. For the project's managing editor, James McGuire, 'This was the most hopeful and yet the most frustrating period in the project's history'. Although they now had an experienced publisher on side, they would need an even more substantial injection of money than originally planned if they were to fast track the production of the volumes. The 'Celtic boom', which began in the mid 1990s, and the Irish government's subsequent largesse, was to prove the project's saviour. The Higher Education Authority stepped in and guaranteed continued funding for the project and work began in earnest in 1997.

As well as employing staff to write and edit entries – one staff member wrote a staggering 300 entries – the *DIB* relied, as has the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* from its outset, on the voluntary contributions of hundreds of authors. Many other specialists volunteered their time to give advice about who should be included in the Dictionary and to read the entries for accuracy and balance.

Just who should be included in national dictionaries of biography has always been a contentious issue. The *ADB* opted for a broad approach and has entries on people who may have never stepped foot in the country but who made an impact on Australian society, or on how Australia was viewed abroad. Charles Dickens and the social reformers, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and Henry George, fit this category. The *DIB*, perhaps necessarily given its much broader span, has a tight eligibility requirement. Only those born in Ireland or who had a career in that country are considered for an entry. This has meant that not only have some prominent English politicians, who had a strong interest in Irish matters, been excluded but many notable people of Irish descent such as former US president John Kennedy and Australia's Ned Kelly (whose Jerilderie

letter one reviewer described as ‘the apex of the Irish threatening letter genre’) have been left out. The great Irish diaspora proved a particular challenge for the *DIB* because of the sheer numbers of people involved. James Quinn, the executive editor of the *DIB*, has suggested that perhaps a ‘complementary dictionary’ about them should be written.

As with the *ADB*, you will not find all politicians or bishops or captains of industry in the *DIB*. Achievement, rather than position, is the more important criterion for inclusion. The *DIB* describes its selection criteria as: the posthumously famous or notorious; those who were significant in their day but have since been forgotten; those unrecognised in their day, whose significance has since been recognised; the holders of high office, whom a reader might expect to find in a national biographical dictionary; those who achieved high professional recognition even if little known to the public; those associated with particularly well-known events; innovators, reformers and pioneers and those with intrinsically interesting careers. Representative figures and colourful characters are also included - as are the ‘unsavoury’. The *DIB* is probably the only national dictionary, so far, to include a named pedophile.

A reviewer, Mark McGinness, has identified 85 Irish Australians in the *DIB*. They include both the well-known - Archbishop Daniel Mannix, D’Arcy Wentworth, Peter Lalor, Robery O’Hara Bourke and Daisy Bates - and the not so well-known - Australian expatriates Raymond McGrath (architect) and John Pritchard (anatomist). Oliver MacDonagh, who died in 2002 and was a professor of history in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University between 1973 and 1990, has an entry.

Described as the largest humanities research project undertaken in Ireland and a milestone in the history of the country’s scholarship, the *DIB* is a considerable achievement. It is not surprising that it won the prestigious 2009 American Publishers’ Award for Professional and Scholarly Excellence for Best Multivolume Reference Work in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

After the hectic rate of production of the last twelve years, which at times saw 33 people (most part-time) working on the project, the *DIB* now maintains a small team of staff to edit the 80 new entries to be added to the website each year.

The *DIB* can be purchased from Cambridge University Press for £775. Individual subscriptions to the online site are not yet available in Australia, though libraries and institutions can take out a subscription.

Web Programmer/Developer Vacancy

The National Centre of Biography is seeking an innovative and creative web programmer/developer to help re-engineer ADB Online and assist with the creation of web-based systems for related E-Research projects in biography and history.

The position is permanent with a starting salary of \$67,025-\$70,526 per annum plus 17% superannuation.

Qualifications

The position would suit an applicant with strong technical skills in web-based application development, Java/PHP, SQL and, in particular, wiki technologies. You will liaise with relevant stakeholders and work with minimum supervision.

A knowledge and understanding of history as an academic discipline would be an advantage.

Role Statement

Under the broad direction of the Director, NCB and General Editor, ADB the successful applicant will:

1. Redesign the ADB's software;
2. Design the ADB's user-interface and interface with other emerging databases, including ADB's Obituaries Australia;
3. Develop intranet processes to streamline NCB/ADB's workflows;
4. Creatively link to external information sources;
5. Work with NCB staff on E-Research projects such as visualisation of existing data;
6. Create mechanisms for users to contribute content
7. Undertake other tasks consistent with the classification level of the position

Selection Criteria

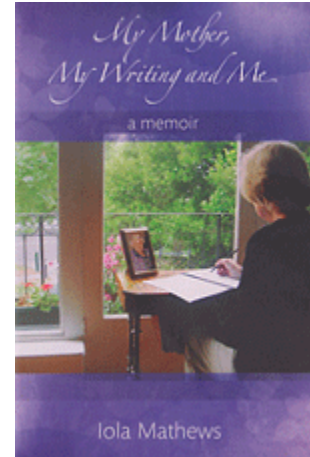
1. Degree in Computer Science or a related field plus relevant experience, or experience in complex web development in a higher education environment.
2. Demonstrated ability to work with SQL, Java and PHP. Experience with Apache Tomcat, Drupal CMS and with wiki software would be an advantage.
3. Demonstrated high level of accuracy and attention to detail.
4. High level written and oral communication skills with the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people.
5. Ability to work cooperatively in a team, and individually, with the ability to use initiative to prioritise competing deadlines.
6. A demonstrated understanding of equal opportunity principles and policies and a commitment to their application in a University context.

Inquiries: Professor Melanie Nolan ph (02) 6125 2131, e: Melanie.Nolan@anu.edu.au

The full job advertisement and application form can be found at <http://jobs.anu.edu.au/PositionDetail.aspx?p=1241>

Applications close on 1 June 2010

Book Review: Iola Mathews, *My Mother, My Writing and Me: A Memoir*, Michelle Anderson Publishing, 2009, 277pp



My Mother, My Writing and Me is an engrossing book; a meditation and a journey through the author's fifties, facing her own aging and the emotional demands of her increasingly frail mother during her mid to late nineties. Mathews has had an active and varied career as a wife, step mother and mother, and simultaneously as a committed second-wave feminist, as a journalist, an industrial advocate and an unspecified role in the corporate sector. As the title indicates, Mathews explores the emotional demands her aging frail mother is forcing on her and her own desire to rekindle her earlier facility in writing, now blocked by many intervening pressures. This theme is emphasised in the book's publicity, but it is so much more than that. Mathews uses the surface story to range backwards in time as thoughts and ideas surface, to explore her life and relationships from childhood to the present. Learning to embrace creative writing is at the heart of Mathews' quest for meaning and fulfilment as she moves into her sixties.

Mathews' Prologue introduces us to her spiritual journey through Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

'Midway this way of life we're bound upon,
I woke to find myself in a dark wood
Whence the right road was wholly lost and gone'

but she hints at the resolution of her quest, emerging 'to look once more upon the stars'. Her journey involves a searching revelation of emotions and relationships which have underpinned her life and her responses to the people around her. She had been through a slough of despond in her early forties when she had been forced to give up her career in journalism due to the patriarchal attitude of her bosses at *The Age* when her husband, Race Mathews, became a cabinet minister in the Victorian Labor government. After a year unemployed, she found fulfilling and satisfying work as an industrial officer for women's employment with the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Ten years later she moved into the corporate world, but now in her middle fifties Mathews found that she wanted to wind back her paid work and public commitments and return to writing. But things keep getting in the way of becoming a serious writer. Most particularly her responsibilities for her aging mother, who as the book opens is in hospital after a fall at her retirement home. The black despair of being trapped by her responsibilities as a daughter of an elderly parent swamp Mathews and prevent her controlling her own life and desires. 'I was fifty-eight and my life was stalled, like a train carriage shunted into a siding'. Her honest, loving description of helping her mother drink from an infant's cup and in the toilet bring on a rueful reflection on the physical deterioration of aging, a reversion to an infantile state.

Her mother was also emotionally dependent on Mathews, demanding daily visits, despite having been settled in her retirement home with attentive staff and compatible companions. Mathews had fallen into the role of major support for her mother. She and

her mother were in Melbourne, her father was dead, her brother was overseas and her sister in New South Wales. She felt 'trapped'. Attempts to begin a disciplined life as a writer were dissipated by her responsibilities for her mother's emotional and physical welfare, and yet to be acknowledged, by a reluctance to face her own emotional demons, frittering away writing time with superficial tasks.

Mathews enrolled in a residential creative writing course, screwing up the courage to tell her mother she would be away for a week. Her recounting of her experience of the course and the breaking of her writer's block through writing exercises, constructive criticism and advice was for me an intensely rewarding episode. She invites the reader to empathise with the experience and excitement of the release of her creative writing drive through delving into memories of living in Paris in her twenties and her love affair there with a married man. This and the other chapters when her writing is flowing reminded me of the different, but equally engaging, writers' quests of Kate Grenville in *Searching for the Secret River* (2006) and Brenda Niall in *Life Class* (2007).

Her memories and current family responsibilities and relationships are skilfully entwined as Mathews proceeds towards a new understanding of herself and her past and present. Her daughter's pregnancy and the baby's birth and her mother's increasing debility combine so that Mathews has to postpone her new career as a writer. But these episodes allow her to reflect on her upbringing in an achievement-oriented middle class family and her father's influence on her intellectual development. Her mother's Presbyterianism and her father's atheism led her through a youthful religious enthusiasm to agnosticism and, belatedly, to a spirituality expressed through her visual senses, her memories, her writing and the wonder of her new-born grandson. Mathews realises that she has developed her left brain, the controlled planning side of thinking, at the expense of the creative right brain; reflected in the different approach she and Race have to writing. She must research and plan before she can write; he combines the two processes simultaneously. For her to release her creativity she needs to develop a spontaneous approach to her writing, delving into her memories and dreams to understand her responses and inhibitions.

Simultaneously her mother's health is deteriorating through a series of small strokes and other physical defects, making increasing demands on Mathews' time and emotions. Nevertheless, in her quest for a writing voice and the uncovering of suppressed memories, she develops an honest examination of why the youthful experience in Paris had been so hurtful to her. Her marriage to Race Mathews, a widower with three young children, after this episode brought its own challenges with his political career making him an absent father for much of the time and Iola's juggling of relationships with her step children and their son and daughter, along with her first career as a journalist. Her daughter's pregnancy as a single parent revives the close relationship they had until her emotional withdrawal as a teenager and young adult. This, like the writing, is a creative, rewarding experience for Mathews.

Mathews gradually acknowledges that she cannot take all of the responsibility for her mother by herself and calls on assistance from her sister. This provides her with a break when she and Race and their extended family of children and grandchildren have a holiday in a converted church at Byron Bay. Here Mathews also realises that their children have grown up and accept responsibilities for ensuring that everything works well on the holiday so that she and Race can happily celebrate their thirtieth wedding anniversary with them without having to be in charge. At this time her mother had a

serious stroke when she might have died, but she rallied and continued her physical and mental decline, prompting Mathews to reveal her own fears of mortality and debility. Mathews' brother and his partner returned to Melbourne and were on hand to assist her with their mother after their sister went home. Their mother was now too frail to be in a retirement home and had to move to a large nursing home before she was allocated a place in a smaller, more intimate one. Mathews' mother lived in increasing frailty until she was almost one hundred.

Mathews realises that she has to treat her writing like a job in the workforce and make time and find a place to encourage herself to write on a regular basis. A lone writer's retreat and a room at Glenfern, a National Trust house at east St Kilda, provide her with a space and the discipline to put her needs ahead of others. She also took on the role of fund-raising to renovate the house to provide other writers' studios. The joint tasks of writing and fund-raising allowed her to make use of both sides of her brain, continuing to use her organising skills, while developing her creativity. She completed the novel which had grown out of her writing course, has revised it and in the process has written this memoir.

My Mother, My Writing and Me is well written and an emotionally honest exploration of Mathews' past, her relationships and her move, after considerable darkness and stress, into a calmer creative person at sixty. She had to shed a lot of guilt over things done and not done and build closer relationships with her brother and sister and her daughter. All through her quest she was buoyed by the loving support of her husband. Mathews sums up her journey:

By the time I turned sixty I was doing what I loved, and I knew that I would go on doing it for as long as I could think clearly and hold a laptop or pen and paper. It occurred to me that there should be a new word for 'retirement', to reflect the fact that most of us can now enjoy twenty or even thirty years of active and liberated life after we leave the workplace.

This is not just a how-to book for retirees. It should be read by all people interested in the creative process and its place in one's priorities, relationships and responsibilities.

Janet Doust

Janet is a Research Editor with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, an historian of Australian colonial history, and an avid reader of autobiography, memoirs and biography.

Howard Florey

The editor of the ANU Reporter, Simon Couper, invited the National Centre of Biography to contribute a series of columns on subjects in the Australian Dictionary of Biography which would be of interest to its readers. This is the fourth of the columns appearing in the series 'Life Sentences'.

Millions of people owe an enormous debt to Howard Florey, who developed penicillin and whose achievements have been likened to those of Jenner, Pasteur and Lister. He was also a founder and chancellor of ANU, yet there are no roads or buildings named after him, nor a statue on campus. His only memorials are a tapestry at University House and a lecture theatre named after him.



Howard Florey

Howard Walter Florey was born in Adelaide in 1898. The only son of a bootmaker, he was educated at St Peter's College (dux 1916) and Adelaide University, from which he graduated in medicine. Awarded a Rhodes scholarship, he entered Oxford University where he worked in the laboratory of Nobel Prize laureate, Sir Charles Sherrington. It was Sherrington who stimulated Florey's interest in experimental pathology and, over the next few years, Florey held positions at Cambridge and Sheffield universities before returning to Oxford as Professor of Pathology. He remained there for the next 27 years.

Florey's laboratory was under equipped and poorly financed but, with the help of the Medical Research Council and the Rockefeller Foundation, it became one of the best equipped laboratories in England, if not the world. Despite his interests in lymphocytes and the cause of atheromatosis, he is best remembered for his work with penicillin. Although discovered by Alexander Fleming, this drug was developed by Florey into the most important therapeutic innovation of the 20th century. Florey hardly knew Fleming and relations between the two were not good because of Fleming's belief that he had not received adequate credit for his discovery. Florey, unassuming as always, put it down to luck that, of the many anti-bacterial substances he could have chosen to work on, he selected penicillin, which, unlike most antibiotics, is not poisonous to human beings and other higher animals.

Penicillin was first tested on a human in February 1941. With only a small quantity of the antibiotic available, it was decided to use it on a man suffering from blood poisoning and on the point of death. Within 24 hours the patient showed a remarkable improvement and further injections were given. His improvement continued, but Florey's stock of penicillin was soon exhausted and the patient died. Florey decided not to treat any more cases until adequate supplies of penicillin were available. When eventually two more patients were treated, both recovered and penicillin's miraculous properties as an antibiotic for humans were demonstrated convincingly.

In 1945 Florey, together with Ernest Chain and Alexander Fleming, shared the Nobel Prize for medicine. Florey always emphasised the serendipitous nature of his research and pointed out that the development of penicillin was a team effort. In 1965 he was created Baron Florey of Adelaide and Marston.

But Florey should also be remembered for his part in founding the ANU, and his role as Chancellor from 1965 to 1968, the year of his death. His life is well summed up by Sir Peter Medawar, who wrote, “He devoted the more important part of his professional life to a single wholly admirable purpose which he pursued until he achieved it, showing, in spite of many setbacks and rebuffs, the magnanimity that is the minimal entry qualification for being considered ‘great’”.

Brian Wimborne

Brian is a researcher with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* reprinted from *ANU Reporter*, Summer 2010