



Australian
National
University

BIOGRAPHY FOOTNOTES

The Newsletter of the National Centre of Biography

Issue 24, 18 December
2023



Credit: Christine Fernon

The Hon Linda Burney MP
at the launch of *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition*, Parliament House
11 September 2023

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The NCB/ADB is a national co-operative enterprise based on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge all First Australians on whose land we live and work.

A Note from the Editor

For those of you who remember the 'Life Sentences' column in the *ANU Reporter*, we have now confirmed it has been discontinued. We will consider bringing it into future editions of *Biography Footnotes*.

Please get in touch with any contributions for next year's edition or if you come across anything you would like to share with the NCB network.

We wish you all the best for the holiday season and the coming year.

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Melanie Nolan, *Canberra Times*,
3 April 2021 (Dion Georgopoulos)

Welcome to Issue 24 of Biography Footnotes

It has been a busy year for the National Centre of Biography (NCB)/*Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*. In September we launched *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition* at Parliament House. The project, led by Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna, was intended to deepen understanding of the journey towards constitutional recognition and Indigenous rights. We were honoured that the Hon Linda Burney MP was able to launch the website.

The Quest for Indigenous Recognition represents a model going forward for contextualising *ADB* articles by way of online exhibitions. Associate Professor Shino Konishi, a historian descended from the Yawuru people, led the earlier ARC-funded project *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography (IADB)*, which is providing a sound foundation upon which to add Indigenous biographies. We have been extremely lucky to have Shino's able leadership of the *IADB* and, together with Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths and Dr Malcolm Allbrook, she is working to redress the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the *ADB*. They are also co-editing a collection, *Reframing Indigenous Lives*, to be published by Routledge in 2024.

The *IADB* project ends in December 2023, but its work—particularly that of the Indigenous Working Party—has established the protocols and processes which will underwrite a new phase of a more general project: First Nations Biography Australia (FNBA). So, following from a smaller grant for the *IADB* (2020–23), I am delighted to announce that the NCB/ADB has been awarded \$774,000 by the J.T. Reid Charitable Trusts for the FNBA project over the next five years (2024–29). I thank Dr Rani Kerin for her role in the application, and for the support provided by Tom Griffiths and the IWP.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for 'truth-telling about our history'. The FNBA project will contribute to this

truth-telling in three main ways. First, it will consolidate the work of the *IADB*—that is, it will continue to add 300 First Nations biographies, written primarily by First Nations people or in collaboration with First Nations communities and families, to the *ADB*. Second, it will identify existing entries about Indigenous Australians that need to be revised, both in response to new sources of information and greater recognition of the settler colonial and racist ideas that have shaped their representation in the dictionary in the past. Third, it will initiate a pilot mapping project to investigate the feasibility of presenting biographical experiences in a multi-layered, interactive map that shows the connections between sites of historical significance to First Nations people (such as missions, reserves, camps and places of conflict).

Many First Nations people express dismay at the neglect and misrepresentation of their people and stories in the education system and national discussion. This project aims to tackle the comparative absence of complex and empowered stories in Australian history. It does not resile from mixed experience. The FNBA project will showcase the lives of Indigenous peoples, by way of biography, in all their diversity.

Dr Emily Gallagher edited this number of *Biography Footnotes*. The NCB/ADB has had considerable staff movement this year. We have welcomed Emily and our new programmer Shenhai (Howie) Chen to ongoing positions. We will also welcome Dr Michelle Staff as our new online and outreach manager in the New Year. Currently Michelle, with Dr Peter Woodley and Matt Cunneen, are in contract positions. We have also farewellled Michael Hannaford and, after twenty-four years, Christine Fernon.

Professor Melanie Nolan

Director, National Centre of Biography
General Editor, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

National Collaboration

The 2023 ADB Editorial Board meeting was held on 31 May 2023. It was chaired by Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths and is the 76th meeting since 1960 (there were some earlier preliminary meetings). The discussion ranged from reports on the progress of Volume 20 to the NCB/ADB's future digital capacity. Following the completion of Volume 20, we are planning to revise entries published in the 1960s and, to this end, there was an afternoon workshop with board members and research editors to discuss the revisions project. You can read more about the meeting on page 7.

The Quest for Indigenous Recognition

The NCB/ADB launched *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition* in September. The project was an initiative of the ADB Editorial Board and aims to provide well-informed and reliable historical information that is easily accessible online and serve as an important educational tool to better inform all Australians seeking to understand the long struggle for Indigenous rights. You can access the project online through the ADB website.

The ADB in Translation

Earlier this year, Tiping Su sent the NCB half a dozen copies of a published volume containing a number of ADB articles on Australian literary figures that have been translated into Chinese. Tiping is the Director of the Australian Studies Centre at Xi'an International Studies University and was a postdoctoral fellow in the NCB/ADB in 2015–16. The translation project is a collaboration of the Australian Studies Centre at the Xi'an International Studies University and the Shaanxi People's Publishing House with the aim to encourage Chinese scholars' interest in Australian literature. The NCB signed a Translation Agreement and Professor Melanie Nolan wrote a preface to the first volume, 'Why translate the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* ('the ADB') articles on novelists, playwrights, and poets into Mandarin?'. Four more volumes are planned.

Congratulations

to NCB students Dr Joshua Black and Dr Tess Gardner on the submission of their PhD theses and subsequent graduations. Josh's thesis, 'Bleeding Off the Page', was a cultural history of the political memoir in Australia. He is now teaching at the ANU, and is the administrative officer for the Australian Historical Association. Tess's thesis, 'Australian Journalist-Advisers in Republican China, 1897–1942', explored the lives of two Australian journalists in early-twentieth-century China. She is currently a visiting scholar at the State Library of NSW, where she is working to update the catalogue and finding aid for the George Morrison collection.

AJBH, No. 7

Number 7 of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, co-edited by Dr Malcolm Allbrook and Matt Cunneen, was launched at the Convict Lives Symposium in July. The event was interdisciplinary and one of the largest gatherings of convict historians and practitioners since the

Covid-19 pandemic. You can read more about the issue and symposium on pages 21–22. The next issue is due for publication in early 2024.

Outreach

The NCB/ADB likes to get out into the wider community. This year Dr Stephen Wilks has chaired three sessions of the 'Our Stories' Biography Book Group series at the ACT Heritage Library and looks forward to returning in 2024. In October Dr Emily Gallagher and Dr Sam Furphy attended and presented at the History Teachers' Association of Australia National Conference in Canberra. They are hoping to develop some teaching and learning materials for use in schools next year.

ADB Medal

Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths and Professor Melanie Nolan presented an ADB Medal to Professor Pat Buckridge for long and distinguished service. Pat joined the Queensland Working Party in 1996 and became its chair in 2000, resigning earlier this year. Over more than twenty-two years, he has excelled in the role and been an exemplary voluntary worker for the ADB. He has made an exceptional contribution to this national project and is a most worthy recipient of the ADB Medal.

Postgraduate Students

Earlier this year, Matt Cunneen, who previously completed his Honours in the ANU School of History and has worked as a research editor for the ADB, began his PhD with Professor Melanie Nolan. His thesis will explore the lives of convicts who left Australia. Matt was also the co-editor of the *ANU Historical Journal II*, Number 4 (2023).

Women's Working Party

The Women's Working Party met twice this year in April and November on Zoom. It has now finished commissioning all the additional entries nominated for Volume 20 of the ADB and members are now looking towards the forthcoming revisions project, in particular the Colonial Women's Project. The WWP is also currently considering joint entries in the ADB to identify any women, especially wives and other relatives, who are either deserving of their own entry or whose lives need to be better accounted for in the existing joint entry.

Indigenous Working Party

The IWP had a one-day meeting in July at the ANU. At the meeting, inaugural chair Professor Odette Best stepped down from her role. She will be replaced by Steve Kinnane, who brings a wealth of experience to the role and is currently a PhD student in the ANU School of History.

ADB Editorial Adjustments

We are now giving authors a word range, such as 700–800 words rather than 750 words, to assuage dismay when research editors add material or tighten entries. While we always aim to name parents, spouses and companions, we are also now allowing children's names to be included where appropriate.

Sound

There are now a growing number of articles on the NCB websites that feature sound. In addition to Nellie Melba and Ella McFadyen, audio links have been added to:

ADB: [Fred Hollows](#), [Howard Florey](#), [Mark Oliphant](#), [Doris Osborne](#), [Don Bradman](#), [Dorothy Helmrich](#), [James McClelland](#) and [Gough Whitlam](#)

Obituaries Australia: [Vivian Bullwinkel](#)

Congratulations

to *ADB* volunteers—authors and members of working parties—who received Australian honours since the last newsletter:

Australia Day Honours 2023

Officer (AO)

Professor Robert Manne

Member (AM)

Professor Judith Brett

Emeritus Professor Jennifer J. Hocking

Professor Donald Markwell

Medal (OAM)

Ms Geraldine Byrne

Mr James V. Lindesay

Dr Ian Pfennigwerth

King's Birthday Honours 2023

Medal (OAM)

Dr Stuart Braga

Dr Madonna Grehan

ADB Author Deaths

It is with great sadness that we note the deaths that have been reported to us since 25 December 2022:

Helen Bourke

S.E. Elphick

Paul Finn

James Goldrick

J. R. J. Grigsby

Niel Gunson

Peter Love

John Kennedy McLaughlin

Richard Milliken

Robert O'Neill

Marianne Payten

Gillian Winter

ADB Editorial Board, May 2023



Left to right: Chris Cunneen, Geoff Ginn, Cath Kevin, Bridget Griffen-Foley, Malcolm Allbrook, Melanie Nolan, Carolyn Rasmussen, Steve Kinnane, David Lee, Tom Griffiths, Talei Mangioni, Deborah Gare, Karen Fox and Rae Frances (Christine Fernon)

NCB STAFF NEWS (CONT'D)

Staff Updates and Movements

This year we farewelled our programmer and web developer, Michael Hannaford, and our online manager, Christine Fernon. Christine has worked at the NCB/ADB for twenty-four years and we are pleased that she will be staying on with us as a volunteer.

We were delighted to welcome Shenhai (Howie) Chen as the NCB/ADB's new web programmer and designer in July, and Dr Michelle Staff will join us as our new online and outreach manager next year. Michelle has been working with us on a contract as a research editor for the last twelve months. Her PhD thesis, 'Women Going Global: Australian and British Feminist Internationalists, 1919–39', was a biographically informed study. She is currently a convenor of the Australian Women's History Network, having served for three years on the editorial collective for *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*. Michelle is also currently working on a biography of the Australian feminist Bessie Rischbieth.

In May the NCB/ADB celebrated the launch of Professor Melanie Nolan's new book, *Biography: An Historiography*. The following month, 'Order, Order!', edited by Dr Stephen Wilks, was launched at Parliament House.

Dr Malcolm Allbrook was a recipient of a small grant from RSSH to support the 'Convict Lives' symposium in July.

Visitors to the NCB/ADB

Through the School of History, the NCB/ADB has continued to host a number of visiting scholars in 2023 who are engaged in collaborative and innovative work on Australian biography.

Ian Hancock is the pre-eminent historian of the Liberal Party in Australia and has written many *ADB* entries on Liberal Party figures. Currently, he is working on biographies of public service mandarin Sir Frederick Wheeler and former Liberal Senator Sir John Carrick. Until this year he was an *ADB*

Editorial Fellow.

Dr Jill Waterhouse is a Canberra-based historian and a member of the Commonwealth Working Party. She is currently working on several biographic projects, including 'The Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of the Australian National University' and a biography of Joshua John Moore, the first white landowner in the region that was later to become Australia's national capital.

Dr Mary-Anne Jebb has recently researched and curated permanent exhibitions with the Mowanjumb Aboriginal community in the Kimberley, the Indigenous Language exhibit at Boola Bardip Perth Museum, and the 'First Fighters' educational resource for AIATSIS. She has created several biographical oral history recordings, and the digital exhibit 'Wudoo-Wurdu' with the ANU Research Centre for Deep History. She is co-author with Dr Malcolm Allbrook of *Hidden Histories of the Pilbara* (nearing publication) and is working on the biography of 'Jack Wherra: Carved Histories of Australia' and the history of Eslanda school in WA and its principal, communist artist Renee Heisler.

Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna is an Honorary Professor in the NCB/ADB from 2021–26. He has general expertise in biography having written about biography as a literary form and genre, and is a prize-winning biographer. He wrote the *ADB* entry on [Manning Clark](#), and his recent book *Return to Uluru* was shortlisted for the 2022 PM's Literary Prize. He is currently writing a history of Australia. Mark is a member of the *ADB* Editorial Board.

Dr Patrick Mullins has several forthcoming books. Currently he is working on a biography of Sydney solicitor and politician [Richard Denis Meagher \(1866–1931\)](#)—for which he won the Copyright Agency Fellowship for non-fiction 2023–24—an influential figure in the Labor Party and one of Cyril Pearl's 'wild men of Sydney.' Patrick is a member of the ANU Lives Editorial Board.



Dr Stephen Wilks in conversation with Derek Drinkwater about 'Order, Order!' at the ACT Heritage Library, 11 November 2023

BIOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

Biography Workshops 2023: an executioner, a prime minister, novelists and spies

The National Centre of Biography hosted ten biography workshops in 2023, with Dr Stephen Wilks as coordinator and chair. The full array of expert speakers who so generously gave their time are listed on the [NCB's website](#), with topics ranging from the hangman 'Nosey Bob' Howard and Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, to issues relating to Indigenous land rights and the history of women in science, including Australia's first female science graduate, Edith Dornwell.

It was the NCB's privilege to host these scholars and writers of talent, and to hear about their projects and books.

This year's workshops helped to impart the excitement of biography as history. Many of the speakers not only stressed the importance of biography as a literary form, but also raised questions of research and method, often grappling with the challenges of organisation, unanswered questions and reactions from readers. Some were still works in progress. We aimed for variety, creativity and interest.

One of the best attended workshops was that by Dr Ebony Nilsson, who spoke on Vladimir Mischenko (a.k.a. [Bill Marshall](#)), Russian émigré and ASIO agent. (Spies never fail to be popular.) This presentation also saw an uncredited appearance in the accompanying overheads by ADB friend and contributor Barry Owen Jones, who was caught by a photographer in 1954 as he queued up to attend a hearing of

the Petrov Royal Commission—it's not too hard to spot him in the photograph below!

In August, after a deep dive the preceding month into the life and literature of Ruth Park by Dr Monique Rooney, Professor Alison Bashford spoke about her history of the Huxley family, *An Intimate History of Evolution* (2022), which is now available as a Penguin paperback. Dr Stephen Chavura added an enlightening sidelight to his talk on Menzies by introducing us to Campion College, an independent institution of higher education in Western Sydney, while Professor Philip Payton stepped in at short notice to remind us that D.H. Lawrence's search for utopia encompassed not only Australia but also Cornwall.

We have in development what will hopefully be an equally popular series of workshops in 2024. We are always pleased to welcome visiting scholars and friends of the NCB/ADB as well as colleagues from across the university, or even further afield, to our monthly workshops. Keep an eye on the events page of our website if you're interested in attending next year.

Dr Stephen Wilks is a research editor for the Australian Dictionary of Biography and a lecturer in the ANU School of History. He holds a doctorate from the ANU about national economic and social development in the twentieth century, focused on the career of Earle Page. Stephen is currently working on a biography of Henry Bolte.



Spot the ADB contributor (hint: look for a moustache). Spectators waiting to attend a hearing of the Petrov Royal Commission, 1954 (Fairfax Media)

BABETTE SMITH, 1942–2021

Melanie Nolan reflects on the life and career of Babette Smith

Babette Smith, born Macfarlane, lived a full and varied life, with a 'zigzag career' in the entertainment industry, law and history. One of her teachers was Freda Whitlam, a prominent Australian educator and feminist, and Babette herself studied history at Sydney University. Her first career, however, was as a marketing executive in the entertainment industry. She was



Babette Smith, 2014 (Trish Davies)

also briefly a Supreme Court judge's associate to her father, and later chief director of the NSW Bar Association (1993–97), where she was the first woman to serve in the role. Her second career was as an industrial mediator in family law and workplace health with a sideline gig as an official jail visitor. I knew Babette through her third career—which overlapped with the other two—as a convict historian. She was a dedicated scholar and colleague who was always generous with her time, especially when it came to the National Centre of Biography and its students.

Like so many others, Babette came to convict history through family history. Though family historians usually begin by researching and recording names and dates to recover 'stories and characters from their family's past', Ashley Barnwell has shown that it 'often branches out into local and social history'. This was certainly the case for Babette, who started working on the family tree that her father had started years earlier after the birth of her son in 1977. Family lore claimed there was a convict ancestor and Babette found her: her great-great-grandmother, Susannah Watson (1794–1877), was a recidivist thief with six children whose 1828 trial

led to 'fourteen years transportation beyond the seas' with her two youngest children.

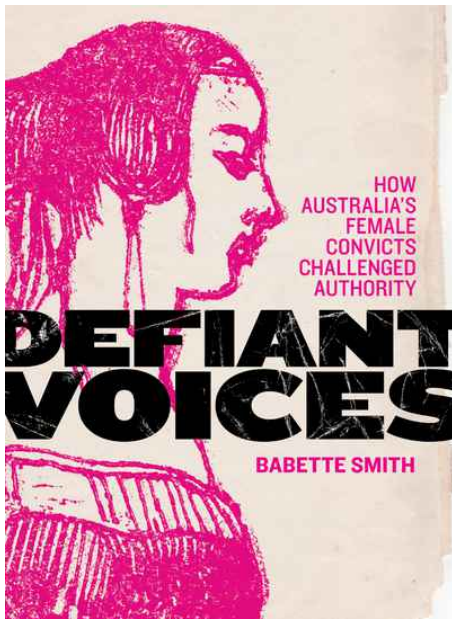
When Babette started writing Susannah's story, she 'transcend[ed] the personal angle' to investigate her life alongside the ninety-nine other women who were transported with her on the *Princess Royal* in 1829. The resulting book, *A Cargo of Women* (1988), was a bestselling account of the lives of a shipload of female convicts. It was revised in 2010, and she also wrote a related novel. Other convict histories were to follow, including *Australia's Birthstain* (2008), *The Luck of the Irish* (2014), *Defiant Voices: How Australia's Female Convicts Challenged Authority* (2021), and much public history.

Babette developed an approach that integrated family, group and collective biography and prosopography. She ended as she began, with women convicts. About 15% of the 163,000 convicts transported to Australia were women. That is approximately 25,000 women. Only a few years ago, I had the great privilege of launching her *Defiant Voices* at the National Library of Australia (NLA). The book, commissioned by the NLA, told the story of those convict women who had spent time in a female factory. Most white Australians, at least one in seven, are believed to be related to one of these women, with Babette's ancestor, Susannah, spending time at the Parramatta Female Factory. The women who appeared in *Defiant Voices* were not demure. They challenged authority and had their own agency. Sometimes this subaltern resistance was collective; at other times their resilience was individual. Often, however, it was inwardly damaging. Babette always painted a diverse and complex picture where 'the outcome for convict women ranged from triumph to tragedy'.

Babette took issue with stereotypes. While transported women were once imagined as promiscuous, exploitative and immoral, with 'spare habits' and having 'vicious lives', she argued that the extent of their relationships and their importance, including temporary partnerships, had been underestimated. Most women convicts who were offered a second chance generally took it seriously. Susannah, who lived to be 83 years old and had a common-law marriage, wrote to her daughter Hannah in England that transportation was the 'Best thing Befell me', apart from the grief of leaving her older children behind.

As an historian Babette always emphasised biography. Statistical sampling has given way to huge prosopographical projects, not only of the transportation experience but also of life before. These longitudinal studies have tended to flourish among family historians who have peopled and filled in the details of individual lives. Babette used the prosopographical data, but always with a view to show range and variation, and always with an eye for biography. For instance, even as she noted that '[s]tatistics reveal that the average age of female convicts was 25 years', she showed how they 'can [also] disguise reality'. A significant number of the women were older whereas others were girls of twelve years.

Finally, I would like to mention Babette's generosity. By 2021 I had worked with her on a number of events. This year the co-



editors of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* dedicated a special issue on 'Convict Lives' to her and Trish Downes in recognition of their contribution to convict history and biography. That same year, Babette dedicated her own book to 'the thousands of family and academic historians whose research into women convicts has produced such riches'. Although she had initially worked independently, she was later an Adjunct Professor at the University of England, where she occupied what Malcolm Allbrook and Sophie Scott-Brown have described as 'the place where two great oceans of research are meeting: family historians outside the academy, with traditionally trained, often university-employed historians.' Babette was an engaged and generous member of the NCB community who is sorely missed by colleagues, friends and family.

Professor Melanie Nolan is the Director of the National Centre of Biography and General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

Melanie Nolan reports on the 76th ADB Editorial Board Meeting

On 31 May 2023 Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths chaired the 76th meeting of the ADB Editorial Board since 1960.

In the meeting we discussed three main issues: progress on Volume 20 (which includes Australian subjects who have died between 1996 and 2000); the NCB/ADB's digital capacity going forward; and how the research that NCB/ADB staff publishes relates to the ADB's core work of publishing concise biographical articles.

ADB articles published this year are all listed on [our website home page](#). Recent articles include [Fred Wheeler](#) (by Nick Brown and Ian Hancock), [Fred Gruen](#) (by Bruce Chapman), [Nugget Coombs](#) (by Tim Rowse), [Diamond Jim McClelland](#) (by Stephen Wilks), [Richard Austin](#) (by Robert Porter), [Lisa Belleair](#) (by Kim Kruger), [Tanganutara](#) (by Gaye Sculthorpe) and [Mick Tjapaltjarri](#) (by Alec O'Halloran). There are now over 33,000 subjects across all of our websites: 13,500 in the ADB, 11,740 in *People Australia* and 8,506 in *Obituaries Australia* (with the total across the three websites adding up to more than 33,000 because some subjects have ADB entries as well as an obituary and *People Australia* (PA) entry, and so on). The ADB entries are increasingly useful for prosopography and collective biographical methods.

Our main online programme for the next few years is to renovate our Biographical Information Management Platform (BIMS). This would be the third development:

1. Gavan McCarthy and Darryl Bennet, 2003–July 2006 Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM);
2. Scott Yeadon and Christine Fernon, 2010–2012 BIMS; and
3. Shenhai (Howie) Chen and Michelle Staff, 2024–2027 BIMS 2.0.

The problem is that BIMS is becoming overloaded and has

been the subject of accumulated patching. BIMS was set up just for the ADB. We then added PA and OA, and later projects within both the ADB and PA. Now, since we intend to add another version with revisions, we need BIMS 2.0.

Thirdly, national biographical dictionary projects are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in larger historiographical conversations, in large part because of the sheer breadth and scope of their content. Generated collectively and collaboratively, the ADB has the potential to stimulate a richer, more pluralistic understanding of Australia's history within and beyond its national borders through its research centre: the NCB. We discussed this synergy at the meeting. For instance, the IADB has generated ADB articles but also the 'Reframing Lives' symposium, from which a published collection will appear in 2024, edited by Malcolm Allbrook, Tom Griffiths and Shino Konishi. Similarly, ADB articles alert us to various historiographical gaps and issues. We are able to publish more sustained discussions in the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* and as monographs in the ANU Press' ANU.Lives series.

The consultative meetings with all working parties over the revisions plans of the ADB, which had been foreshadowed at the 2022 Editorial Board meeting, had all been held by 31 May. The ADB is a national collaboration of eleven state and thematic working parties; and Malcolm and myself duly met, either in person or virtually, with each in the lead up to the 2023 Editorial Board meeting. The revisions plans were dealt with separately with a dedicated workshop in the afternoon. As well as discussing wider issues, working parties all reported their views on the plans. We will begin to commission revised ADB entries from 2026.

Professor Melanie Nolan is the Director of the National Centre of Biography and General Editor of the ADB.

TRISH DOWNES, 1947–2023

A Tribute to Trish Downes by Frank Bongiorno

It is a great honour to offer a few words of tribute to a student, colleague, and friend with whom I worked for over a decade. That experience has been one of the greatest privileges of my life.

Trish Downes came to the Australian National University to study after a distinguished career in the Royal Australian Navy. That pathway was far from uncommon for retired members of the services but in Trish's case, her years of study were part of a wider love of, and commitment to, history, which had seen her create the Australian Pioneers website, volunteer as a guide at the Australian War Memorial, and participate as a member of the Irish Special Interest Group of the Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra. In all of this activity, there was an ethic of duty and service: what



Trish Downes at her graduation, 2012 (Peter Mayberry)

people called Trish's generosity but which Trish herself saw as just what you did as a part of a community. And she loved it all.

Trish flourished at the ANU and in 2012 completed an excellent Honours degree in History. Her thesis subject was the Clarke bushranging gang, active around Braidwood in

the 1860s: a strange choice, perhaps, for a very law-abiding retired naval officer. The Clarkes were so violent and ruthless that the kind of romantic defence familiar in Kelly folklore, or even for 'Brave Ben Hall' and 'Captain Thunderbolt', seemed a tall order here. But Trish's choice reflected her abiding interest in social and colonial history, her engagement with her region, and her identity as a product of the old Australia of pioneer, bush and town. Her work in the archives was meticulous, and its quality recognised by examiners, as by her supervisor.

Trish then went on to a PhD project exploring the history of convicts transported to Australia from the army or navy titled: 'Redcoats transported: British soldiers transported to the Australian colonies 1788-1868'. This one was perhaps easier to explain: the convicts in her own family history and the military background surely pointed in this direction. The effort quickly turned into a project of major significance that attracted a level of interest from scholars around the world that was highly unusual in the work in progress of a PhD student.

As a former naval communications officer, Trish was skilled in the assembly, organisation and analysis of large amounts of dispersed information, and she now brought the skills developed over a lifetime into a dialogue with the techniques of social history. Drawing on a vast archival record in Australia and the United Kingdom, Trish created a database of 6500 'military convicts' and was able to use that data to challenge some of the stereotypes that attached to both soldiers and sailors in general, and to those transported for offences.

Trish did much more than that, also working her way through a vast body of other sources that gradually built up a picture of what the experiences of these convicts were across a range of domains; as border police, in colonial exploration, in places of secondary punishment, and in the different colonies. She contested the idea that such men were the bad eggs that they had sometimes been presented, disclosing the high regard in which many came to be held, their achievements in the colonies, and their role in the making of settler society. With her careful research, she was also able to contextualise famous—or infamous—incidents in Australian convict history such as the notorious punishment of Joseph Sudds and Patrick Thompson in heavy irons by Governor Ralph Darling, to explain why they were treated as they were and how their experience related to that of other soldiers in New South Wales at the time. Like the best historians, she made the unfamiliar familiar, and the familiar strange—but always more complicated and interesting. It was a monumental effort—perhaps the kind of project that had more commonly involved multiple researchers in the past—but Trish worked on it steadily and successfully. Each chapter came out in nearly perfect prose, meticulously referenced, and not a long way from readiness for the eyes of examiners.

We had a bit of a routine going, too. Trish would normally prepare a paper for a conference, which would then be a

milestone on the way to completion of a chapter. I always enjoyed sitting in on these triumphs when I could be present. This approach to her work suited Trish well for a few reasons. She loved going to conferences! But Trish was also so meticulous that she lacked confidence that her work was up to scratch, even when it so obviously exceeded normal expectations of what should be achieved. The response she invariably received at these gatherings of historians was perhaps affirming for her, even if she was reluctant to admit it.

Before her illness, the greatest challenge Trish faced was balancing her desire to tell the story with the need, in a thesis, to take step backwards and reflect on it in a more analytical way. Trish's love of the chase was what drove her—to find out what had happened, to be sure she understood the sequence of events, and to tell an engaging story based on that hard won research. But as she developed in her doctoral work, she better came to see the role of the historical imagination in this process, the importance of that 'step back' from the detail to reflect on the bigger picture, the humility of accepting that some things would have to remain uncertain because the sources were inconclusive. I always sensed that last bit, in particular, was hard for Trish, although certainly not because she lacked personal humility. Humility was one of her most distinctive traits. The issue was that Trish was such a tiger in the archives that she found it difficult to give up! Trish had achieved so much in her life. It can be difficult for such high achievers to concede there might not be a way through.

Trish was well on the way to completing an important study when her illness was diagnosed. The years ahead were difficult ones for her, but they also revealed the depths of character—Trish's courage, dignity and humour—and the strength of her commitment to historical research. In many ways, it was as before. Famously, in July 2018 Trish turned up to present a paper at the Australian Historical Association conference in Canberra straight from some blast of full-on medical treatment on the same day; she merely issued an advance warning that she might be a little late. But she got there, she presented, and few were any the wiser about what her day had been before she had given another splendid paper.

We continued to meet regularly – in person in the early years and, as her health declined against the background of the pandemic – on Zoom, with occasional visits to her house over coffee and French pastries. Trish continued to research and write – she only gave up a few weeks before the end when she had no choice. Nor did her illness stop Trish from continuing to participate in the life of the university.

Let me talk a little about this aspect of Trish's life as a historian. Trish was a joiner. She participated fully in the life of the School of History. She missed few opportunities for attending seminars, public lectures and workshops. She enjoyed the social aspects of academic life and contributed to building and maintaining intellectual fellowship and community. She made many friends among the other students and was a generous mentor to younger scholars—and especially those who shared her enthusiasm for Australian colonial history. And this collegiality extended well beyond

the ANU. Earlier this week Charlotte Macdonald, Professor of History at Victoria University of Wellington - Te Herenga Waka – wrote to me to recall her long and mutual exchange with Trish, beginning in a symposium Charlotte ran in Wellington in late 2017 to which Trish 'brought that great zest for historical discovery' as well as her 'delight in new places and people'. As Charlotte added, Trish will be 'remembered across many historical communities'.

Over recent years, few realised how ill Trish was, for as long as she was, because she was so determined that life would go on as before, and because nothing of her cheerfulness had drifted away. In Trish's final weeks, she was determined that her cherished book collection should go to young historians making their way. It is pleasing that it will.

Trish represented what I have always thought best in universities, virtues that have come under growing pressure in recent years: a sense of curiosity for its own sake, of discovery as a joy, of collegiality as precious and productive rather than being viewed as a hindrance to 'getting on with one's own work'. Trish also practised these virtues in the wider discipline and profession of history. I have already mentioned that her work quickly attracted wide interest. In time, it also attracted respect, as did the woman who was creating it. Trish gained the admiration of many scholars in Australia and overseas working in and around convict history. She came to be seen as 'one of them', a historian whose research mattered.

It was, of course, a disappointment to Trish that she was unable to complete her thesis. But some of her work is shortly to be published, and it is my hope that more of it will also see light of day. Those meticulous drafts of Trish should now come into their own. I also hope, and expect, that the massive database that Trish produced will also be a resource for future scholars.

That would be very much in keeping with Trish's approach to life and history. I will miss our conversations—which extended well beyond her research. I offer condolences to John, Trish's beloved brother, and to Trish's many dear neighbours and friends—including those in the School of History. We will miss her but also cherish the memory of our fellowship with her, the marvellous things she discovered and shared, and the meaning she brought to her life, as well as to ours.

Professor Frank Bongiorno AM is a historian in the School of History at the ANU. He is President of the Australian Historical Association and the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. His latest book is Dreamers and Schemers: A Political History of Australia (La Trobe University Press/Black Inc., 2022).

*This tribute was delivered as a eulogy by Professor Nicholas Brown at Norwood Park Crematorium, Canberra, on 14 April 2023.

ADB MEDAL 2023 - PAT BUCKRIDGE

ADB Medal awarded to Pat Buckridge

On 23 August 2023, Professor Patrick Buckridge, a long-time volunteer and friend of the ADB and Chair of the Queensland Working Party, was awarded the ADB Medal among a gathering of friends and colleagues in Brisbane. In awarding the medal, Tom Griffiths, Chair of the ADB Editorial Board, reminisced on Pat's long and distinguished service to the ADB, particularly in Queensland.

In 2014, soon after Pat retired from Griffith University, Susan Lever wrote that he is 'that rare person—even in the academic world: a true scholar with a deep, sometimes eccentric, passion for ideas.' What a lovely tribute! No wonder you found a congenial home with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Pat. We're all eccentrics here.

Pat's intellectual orientation has become increasingly vital to society throughout his lifetime. His interest in the great works of literature, in authorship and biography, in the history and culture of reading, and in close reading itself as a methodology—these stances have long been central to the strategies of the humanities scholar, but Pat has elucidated them with particular finesse. He has cultivated a body of scholarly work that urges us to think as contextually as possible about texts. I am struck that this scholarly strategy has become, in the digital age, quite radical. The digital search engine has exploded the text into a million little rearrangeable bits. The careful, attentive reading of texts as a whole has become harder for people to insist upon. Reading a whole text without interruption, one word after another as the writer intended, respecting and interrogating the original sequence of thought and narrative—this academic behaviour is sadly becoming rarer.

I am currently working with an interdisciplinary team here in Queensland analysing a body of published work that has become important in native title matters, and the innovative methodology that I bring to the collaboration is to read the books from start to finish in the order that they were written. Few others are doing that. Social scientists are apt to be atomistic with texts. Cherry-picking is empowered by digital technology and can seem efficient. What I am trying to say, Pat, is that your work—always important—has become even more so.

We have been so lucky to draw on Pat's skills, and his inclination to holism, at the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. He is interested not only in the past but in how we remember it. For example, his celebrated book about the scandalous [Brian Penton](#) is of course a biography, but it is also an essay on forgetting. He reconstructs a life, but he does more than that—he explores the political contours of memory, and of disremembering. Pat's scholarship works against the forces of forgetting and, in doing so, those forces naturally become part of his analysis. This is the task of the historian or literary scholar: to recover the past as best one can, and to attend also to everything that obscures or illuminates that past. No wonder Pat came to invest in the national biographical project, with its constant, never-ending unearthing of neglected and celebrated lives, its constant sifting of significance. That investment—to which we here are all dedicated—is what



Pat Buckridge at ADB Medal presentation luncheon, 2023

generates a rich biographical scholarship, a healthy public culture, and a stronger and more truthful nation.

So much of the work people do for the ADB is quiet and hidden, behind-the-scenes, diplomatic, tailored and constructive. These are delicate, generous scholarly skills. Pat has exercised them with distinction. He has been working for the ADB for almost three decades, as a member of the Queensland Working Party since 1996 and as Queensland Section Editor and Working Party Chair since 2000. That's a long, steady commitment to a great public cause, to a wonderful national collaboration, and it is work done in good faith for the common good with little expectation of reward or recognition.

But we do now humbly offer, by way of recognition and esteem, this beautiful medal. The ADB Medal is awarded by unanimous decision of the Editorial Board of the ADB, so it is an honour bestowed on Pat by admiring colleagues who know very well what he has done. On behalf of Editorial Board members, ADB staff in Canberra and the Queensland Working Party, let me sincerely thank you, Pat, warmly congratulate you, and present you with the ADB Medal for long and distinguished service.

ADB Medal Citation

Patrick Buckridge's long and distinguished service to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* began in 1996 when he joined the Queensland Working Party. Most ADB working party members have been historians; Pat is conspicuous in being a literary scholar. He first worked in Renaissance literature, but turned to Australian literature, Queensland studies, studies in biography and, more recently, the history of reading. As a consequence, he kept abreast of the work of scholars in many subjects. He brought to the group not only immense learning in fields he made his own, of Australian literature, biography, and literary history, but also extensive



Queensland Working Party members and friends attend Pat's medal ceremony, 2023

knowledge of broader Australian history. At meetings of the Working Party, it was extraordinary how often he could quickly name the best people to approach as potential authors for new articles.

Professor Buckridge was director of the Queensland Studies Centre at Griffith University, Editor of the *Queensland Review*, as well as chair of the *ADB's* Queensland Working Party. When he retired from his long career at Griffith University in 2013, Kay Ferres convened a symposium to honour Patrick as an intellectually generous colleague, to recognise the quality of his scholarly work in literary studies, and to acknowledge his service in the university and in the wider community. We have been fortunate that Pat continued 'in retirement' to chair the Queensland Working Party for a further decade.

Beginning with Brian Penton—on whose life he had written a multi-award-winning book— Pat has published model *ADB* entries on twelve individuals (and he has recently completed another). His articles are notable for their graceful and engaging prose, deep research, and wise and judicious evaluations of their subjects. In addition to a number of prominent figures, he has chosen to write perceptive articles on lesser-known, ordinary and deeply revealing biographical subjects.

In 2000 Pat succeeded Ross Johnston as Queensland Section Editor and Chair of the Queensland Working Party. For more than twenty-two years, he excelled in both roles. As Section Editor, he provided research editors with sound advice and guidance. As Working Party Chair, he displayed outstanding leadership. With unflinching courtesy, good humour, consideration for the views of others, encouragement of consensus, and—before the days of Zoom meetings—a bottle of wine, he fostered and maintained a culture of harmonious productivity, ensuring that the Working Party invariably met its commitments.

From 2000 to 2023 Pat was a valued member of the *ADB's* Editorial Board, ever ready with well-considered counsel and always friendly and collegial. Pat was a Chief Investigator in the three Australian Research Council Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities projects that enabled the *ADB* to be published online as a free-to-web scholarly resource. His high personal and academic standing at his university ensured that it provided significant financial support for the projects.

An exemplary voluntary worker for the *ADB* over many years, Pat Buckridge has made an exceptional contribution to this national, collaborative project and is a most worthy recipient of the *ADB* Medal.

Adelaide masterclass in historical biography

Earlier this year, on 24 February, Flinders University, in association with the University of Adelaide, hosted Dr Malcolm Allbrook and Professor Melanie Nolan to present a masterclass on 'Historical Biography: Australians, biography and history'. Associate Professor Catherine Kevin, historian and Chair of the South Australian Working Party, organised this well-attended event and we met in the State Library's Jervis Room on North Terrace.

In the first session, Melanie discussed the theories and methods historians utilise in their biographical practices and

the current Australian 'biographical landscape', while Malcolm presented on the *ADB* as a research tool for Australian historians, showcasing the online research methods that are available to website users our *ADB* databases.

Melanie and Malcolm subsequently met with the South Australian Working Party to discuss the revision plans in a dedicated session after the masterclass.

ADB ENTRIES FROM 1997 TO 2000

Christine Fernon highlights new *ADB* entries added this year

Entries are being added to the *ADB* website for those who died between 1997 and 2000. As usual they include a diverse range of people. Many of the selection below will be familiar:

An out-of-period entry on [Gough Whitlam](#) (1916–2014) by political biographer Jenny Hocking was added. Best remembered for being sacked as prime minister by Governor-General [John Kerr](#) on 11 November 1975, Hocking analyses the events that led to the Dismissal as well as his three years in government and the many other achievements of Whitlam—described by Noel Pearson, at his memorial service, as Australia's 'greatest white elder'.

Fellow labor politician 'Diamond' [Jim McClelland](#) (1915–1999), a good friend of Kerr, became minister for manufacturing industry in 1975. After resigning from the Senate in 1978, he became a judge on the New South Wales Industrial Commission and the first chief justice of the New South Wales Land and Environmental Court (1980–85). As president of the Royal Commission into British nuclear tests in Australia (1984–85) he helped secure access to British archives, and he took pains to gather evidence directly from Aboriginal witnesses.

[Dorothy Long](#)'s (1925–1999) big break in filmmaking came with her screenplay for the film *Caddie* (1976), which was about a barmaid living in Sydney during the Great Depression. She then formed her own production company before writing and producing *The Picture Show Man* (1977) and the very successful *Puberty Blues* (1981) with Margaret Kelly. She was the first woman to be elected president (1972) of the Australian Writers' Guild and in 1984 was appointed the first chair of the advisory committee of the National Film and Sound Archive.

[Daphne Gollan](#) (1918–1999) was one of a group of radical women who formed a Women's Liberation group in Canberra in 1970. Perhaps as many of them were historians, and conscious of the value of primary sources, they (Gollan in particular) kept, often hilarious, minutes of their meetings. A communist from the age of twenty, Gollan worked as a librarian before moving with her husband to Canberra. Further study saw her enter academia herself as a tutor and later lecturer in Modern Revolutions at the ANU.

First Nations artist [Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri](#) (c1923–1998) was born at Marnpi, about 520 kilometres west of Alice Springs, and as a child travelled with his family through the desert. He began making and selling paintings while living at Papunya Aboriginal Reserve in the 1970s. Using dotting, linework and figuration in his art, he drew upon his deep cultural knowledge, having the authority and rights to paint these subjects from tjukurpa (Dreaming or Law ceremony and ritual) through his wati status. He won first prize of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Art Award in 1991 (Darwin) and shared the Alice prize in 1994 (Alice Springs). That same year he received the prestigious Red Ochre award from the Australia Council for the Arts for his outstanding lifetime achievement and contribution to Aboriginal art. His legacy includes over 700 paintings.

[Patricia Haddy](#) (1930–1999) will be remembered by many for her long-running role as Helen Daniels ('Gran') on the popular TV show *Neighbours* from 1985 to 1997. Her career began in Adelaide as a radio actor with the ABC. She later performed on stage and in television, and had roles in many

films and miniseries that became classics of Australian cinema, including *Seven Little Australians* (1973), *The Fourth Wish* (1976), *Newsfront* (1978) and *A Town Like Alice* (1981). For the animated film *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1977) she performed as a voice artist.

Dr [Peter Bayliss](#) (1928–1999) worked with fellow abortion law reform campaigner Bertram Wainer at the Fertility Control Clinic in Melbourne from 1972. Moving to Queensland in 1978 he opened a clinic there. After the State Government's Pregnancy Termination Control Bill 1980 was defeated in parliament, the cabinet authorised a raid on the clinic, confiscating 18,000 patient files, and arresting and holding Bayliss at the police watchhouse. The Full Court of the Supreme Court of Queensland ruled that the warrants used were invalid and ordered all medical files to be returned and charges against Bayliss were also later dropped.

[Philip Woodward](#) (1912–1997) QC had built up a large practice specialising in cases of libel before being appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1971. In 1977 the NSW Government appointed him the sole commissioner of the State royal commission into drug trafficking. The Commission was partly a response to the disappearance of prominent anti-drugs campaigner Donald McKay at Griffith in 15 July 1977. Woodward's six-month appointment was extended several times; his report being presented in October 1979. He made eighty-nine recommendations covering a range of issues, including law enforcement, intelligence gathering, State-Federal and international co-operation, and the treatment of addicts and offenders. The report confirmed evidence, hitherto not publicly revealed, about organised crime and its links to drug-dealing. Woodward left the Supreme Court in 1982.

[Doris Carter](#) (1912–1999) was a schoolteacher, accomplished athlete, and army officer. She represented Australia in the high jump at the Berlin Olympics (1936), where she was placed equal fifth while competing with an injured right leg and became Australia's first female field athlete to compete at an Olympic Games. In 1938 she went on to compete in the same event at the British Empire Games in Sydney. Widely acclaimed as Australia's most versatile sportswoman, she played for the Victorian women's hockey team in 1937, but had to pull out of the Australian team's 1939 tour to England when the State education department refused to grant her leave. She also played baseball and cricket. During World War II Carter joined the Women's Air Training Corps in Melbourne as an instructor. In early 1951, when the Royal Australian Air Force reorganised the women's branch, Carter was selected as inaugural director of the Women's Royal Australian Air Force. In 1960 she was appointed general secretary of the Melbourne YWCA. In a list of memorable firsts, she was the first (with Sybil Taggart) to be appointed to an Olympic organising committee and in 1956, as general manager of the Australian women's Olympic team, she led the athletes onto the Melbourne Cricket Ground at the opening of the Olympic Games. She was also the first woman to lead an Anzac Day march in 1996.

Christine Fernon is the NCB's online manager and is assisting Dr Chris Cunneen to add the Biographical Register of the Australian Labour Movement to the NCB's People Australia website.

Kiera Donnelly and Rani Kerin report on the *IADB*

December 2023 marks the end of a significant chapter at the NCB/ADB. This month the *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography (IADB)*, the ADB's collaborative research project, will formally end. Led by Associate Professor Shino Konishi (UWA/ACU), in conjunction with chief investigators Dr Malcolm Allbrook and Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths, it was funded through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Indigenous Projects funding scheme.

While the ARC funding will cease, the *IADB* project team will continue working until all biographies that have already been commissioned and submitted are published. The final ARC project report will be due late next year. Thereafter, the important work of publishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biographies will continue with ongoing support from the Indigenous Working Party and the J.T. Reid Charitable Trusts.

IWP Formation

In 2014 the ADB's General Editor, Professor Melanie Nolan, recommended the appointment of historian Dr Shino Konishi, descended from the Yawuru people, and Miriwoong writer and scholar Steve Kinnane to the ADB Editorial Board. Two years later, Shino and Steve reconstituted the Indigenous Working Party, recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics from across Australia.

The inaugural IWP chair was Gurreng Gurreng Odette Best (USQ), who was also appointed to the ADB Editorial Board. Other members included Yorta Yorta Julie Andrews (LaTrobe), Wiradjuri Laurie Bamblett (ANU), Whadjuk Nyungar (Noongar) Leonard (Len) Collard (Notre Dame), Brenda L. Croft, descended from the Gurindji/Malngin/Mudburra peoples (ANU), Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu Linda Ford (CDU), Narungga Natalie Harkin (Flinders), Steve Kinnane (ANU), Shino Konishi (ACU), Greg Lehman, descended from the Trawulwuy people of North East Tasmania (UTAS), Ngarigu Jakelin (Jaky) Troy (USyd), palawa Maggie Walter (UTAS), Mabuiag Elder Uncle John Whop (Batchelor) and Barry Judd, descended from the Pitjantjatjara people (UoM). Barry has since had to make the decision to leave the IWP due to competing commitments and

time pressures.

Project reflections

The primary aim of the *IADB* was to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biographies in the ADB. The initial target was to add 190 new entries. Before we began there were only 210 First Nations biographies (out of nearly 13,000 entries) in the ADB. This target was calculated to increase the number to a level that matched the Indigenous presence in the Australian population today (approximately 2.3%)—in numerical terms, to reach 400 biographies of significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Once the project commenced, a new goal emerged, and the focus shifted to prioritising First Nations people as authors or co-authors. Entries written by descendants or in conjunction with descendants of the biographical subject were given the highest priority by the IWP. This signalled a departure from regular ADB processes, in which family members are not usually approached as authors. Nearly half of all *IADB* articles (approximately 40%) have been written or co-written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a significant development which has had flow-on effects for other work processes. To reflect this goal of emphasising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, a new revised target was set: to add 100 new Indigenous entries to the ADB.

Processes

Two research editors, Dr Rani Kerin and Dr Kiera Donnelly, were employed to work on the *IADB* project. Between them they have research edited nearly 100 new First Nations biographies for the ADB, developing and adapting new methods of working to suit the nature of Indigenous, and especially Indigenous-authored, entries.

Generally speaking, the kind of concise biography practised at the ADB is a stylised form that has been developed over a lengthy period. ADB entries conform to particular set of conventions and rules that have changed little since the dictionary was first published in the 1960s. The *IADB* has influenced a relaxation of some of those conventions to better suit the narrative styles, lived experiences, and cultural protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, the *IADB* has allowed flexibility in the language used to describe sensitive topics, such as death, and has expanded

Members of the Indigenous Working Party, 2017

(left to right)
Back Row: Natalie Harkin, Barry Judd, Jakelin Troy, Malcolm Allbrook, Melanie Nolan
Front Row: Steve Kinnane, Shino Konishi, Odette Best

(Christine Fernon)



IADB PROJECT (CONT'D)

the number and range of family members named in articles in acknowledgement of Indigenous norms and practices. The terminology used to describe occupations has also broadened to be more inclusive of First Nations' experiences.

Several new practices—some of which have also influenced the way research editors approach *ADB* articles more generally—have been developed for *IADB* entries, including:

- always being conscious of acting in accordance with the advice and expectations of the IWP, family members, and the community of deceased individuals.
- early and regular consultation with authors to gain approval for any changes made in the editing process.
- understanding that entries cannot proceed if family members refuse permission.
- early peer review by at least two readers (an IWP member and an expert in the subject area) and IWP approval prior to publication.
- normalising Indigenous words and voices.
- Indigenous perspectives by reducing the focus on colonial and other non-Indigenous observers' perspectives and understanding that non-Indigenous observers' views are often mediated through a set of racist tropes.
- highlighting family/group/community approval where relevant in an author statement.

Difficulties

The project has also experienced some unexpected difficulties. For example, it was far more difficult than anticipated to commission biographies from the Torres Strait, even with the enthusiastic support and involvement of elder and IWP member Uncle John Whop. This reflects a long-term lack of engagement from mainstream/mainland Australian historians in Torres Strait Islander histories, and highlights the need for deeper engagement with Torres Strait Islander peoples in their communities.

The *IADB* also found it difficult to commission biographies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Existing at the intersection of two marginalised identities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women tend to be subjugated in history and excluded from historical records, making the research and writing of their lives extremely challenging.

July IWP meeting

In July 2023 the *ADB* hosted an IWP meeting at the ANU. Members travelled to Canberra to discuss the ending of the ARC-funded project and the next steps for the IWP and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biography at the ANU. We took the opportunity to enjoy socialising and networking, having lunch with staff from across CASS, and an afternoon tea and catch-up with a few members of the Oceania Working Party.

Following the meeting, Shino Konishi, Julie Andrews, Odette Best, Brenda Croft, Steve Kinnane, Greg Lehman, and Uncle John Whop (Batchelor) reflected on the *IADB* in 'Who's Your Mob?: An Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography', *Australian Book Review*, October 2023, no. 458.

What's next?

As we mentioned, the *IADB* project team will continue finishing the entries we currently have in progress, including those that were only submitted recently. Once all of the biographies have been published, a special standalone *IADB* volume will be published as part of the ARC output. Next year, once all the biographies from the project are published, we hope to provide further reflections on the articles produced.

Dr Kiera Donnelly, Indigenous research officer, and Dr Rani Kerin, research officer, are both research editors for the IADB at the NCB. Kiera is an Aboriginal person (Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr), living and working on the unceded land of the Ngunnawal people, which is also connected to and claimed by the Ngambri people. Rani is a non-Indigenous person of European descent living on Dja Dja Wurrung Country.



Members of the Indigenous Working Party, 2023

(left to right)
Back Row: Julie Andrews, Steve Kinnane, Shino Konishi
Front Row: Greg Lehman, Uncle John Whop, Kiera Donnelly, Brenda Croft

(Christine Fernon)

COMRADE ALEXANDER ZUZENKO

Kevin Windle introduces us to Comrade Alexander Zuzenko

Alexander Mikhailovich Zuzenko, political agitator, radical journalist and Comintern agent, was determined to spark a socialist revolution in Australia that would spread across the British Empire.

Born in April 1884 in the port city of Riga, Alexander Zuzenko went to sea at an early age and was drawn into the revolutionary movement in his late teens. When revolution threatened to overthrow Tsarist rule in 1905, he participated in strikes and disturbances and was briefly imprisoned.

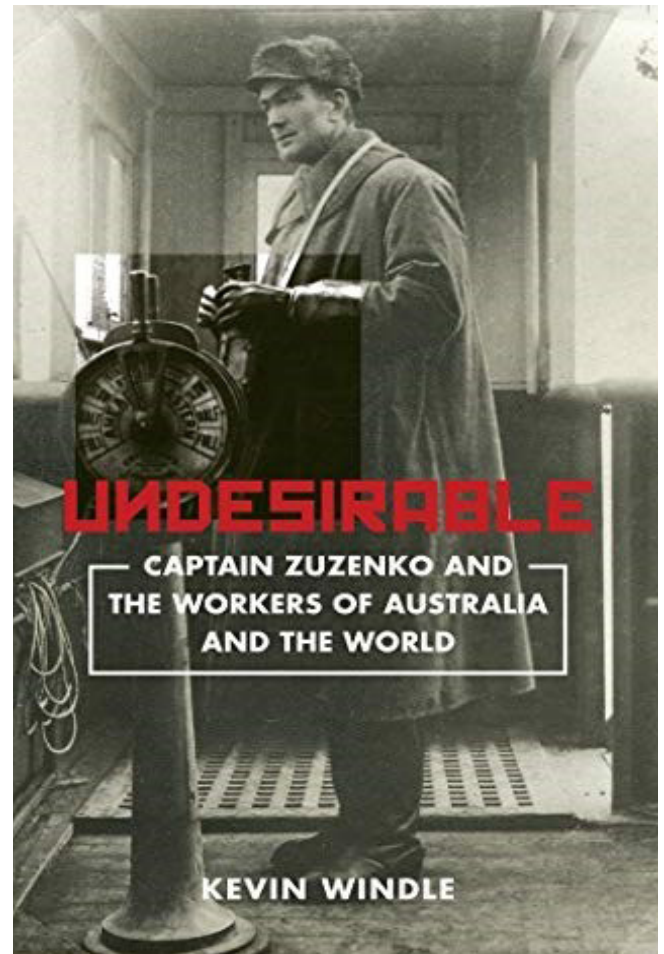
Zuzenko settled in Australia in 1911, where he became active in anarchist circles in Queensland. In Brisbane in 1918 he was elected secretary of the militant Union of Russian Workers and editor of its Russian-language weekly. He subsequently led a demonstration of Russian and Australian workers through the streets of Brisbane under the banned red flag on 23 March 1919. The returned soldiers came out in force in response to 'kick the Russians out of Brisbane' and violent disturbances continued for a week. Zuzenko was quickly arrested and deported, and his wife Civa followed him on another ship. In Odessa, Civa gave birth to the first of their three children in November 1919.

In 1920 Zuzenko made contact with the leaders of the newly-formed Communist International (Comintern). He persuaded them, and Lenin himself, that Australia was ripe for socialist revolution and that he himself would be the man to organise the country's Communists as an effective revolutionary force. A mission was duly approved and funding released, enabling him to set out for Australia in October 1920. Complications attended every stage of the journey, and he did not reach Australia until July 1922, having spent many months in Britain, Canada and the United States of America.

On arrival in Sydney, Zuzenko found Australia's Communists in disarray: two warring factions were competing for the title of 'Communist Party of Australia'. By force of personality, he was able to impose unity on his terms.

Zuzenko's false passport and alias did not deceive the security agencies: in August 1922 he was arrested in Melbourne and sentenced to deportation for entering the country illegally. In September he was shipped to London, where the British authorities considered what to do with an alien holding an obviously false passport who wished to proceed to Russia. Having interrogated him and held him in prison for three months, they allowed him to proceed to Petrograd. His detailed account of his mission, and a separate report on the state of the workers' movement in the Anglo-Saxon countries, are preserved in the Comintern archives.

After a period as harbormaster in the southern port of Mariupol, and some months as a journalist in Moscow, Zuzenko returned to the sea in 1924 as a master mariner in the Baltic Maritime Shipping Line (BMSL). He moved with his family to Leningrad, and from there made voyages to the ports of Britain, Germany and France. Among his eminent passengers visiting the USSR were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, William and Zelda Coates, and the French biographer of Stalin Henri Barbusse, some of whom made special mention of him in accounts of their travels.



In April 1938, at the height of the great purge, Zuzenko was arrested. By this time he was disillusioned by the waves of arrests taking place around him, but was careful not to disclose his views to anyone outside his family. Nevertheless, he found himself charged with espionage on behalf of the British, sentenced to death and immediately executed on 25 August. Posthumous rehabilitation came in 1956, in the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin.

Much mythology came to surround Zuzenko's name, some of it clearly encouraged in his lifetime by the protagonist himself. It is often claimed that he was sentenced to death in Australia or Britain, and that the King personally wanted him executed. The story is baseless but may derive from Zuzenko's own colourful tales. Likewise, there is no truth in the story of his meeting Maksim Litvinov in the cells of Brixton Prison and subsequently being exchanged for a large number of British officers. It is abundantly clear from the British and Australian documentation of the case that no death sentence was mooted, and no exchange proposed, but this did not prevent this story and others equally spurious gaining wide currency in memoirs, fiction, and radio and television features based on his career.

Kevin Windle is Professor Emeritus in the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at the ANU.

LAUNCH OF 'ORDER ORDER!'

Stephen Wilks discusses the launch of 'ORDER, ORDER!'

The ANU Press publication *'Order, Order!': A Biographical Dictionary of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the Australian House of Representatives*, edited by Dr Stephen Wilks, was launched at Parliament House, Canberra, on 19 June 2023. It was the culmination of a long research project, and shines a light on sixty-five of the remarkable men and women who have served in these national offices since Federation. It also provides detailed studies of the development of these offices, with an analysis of the types of individuals that typically filled them and a discussion on the emergence of an Australian model of the speakership based on pragmatic compromise.

The launch event was attended by many current and former Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the House as well as a number of MPs, staff of the Department of the House of Representatives, scholars, students, and relatives of the biographical subjects who feature in the book.

The book is part of the *ANU Lives Series in Biography* and, like all ANU Press publications, it is open access and freely available online. To download the full-text or individual chapters visit the ANU Press website: ['Order, Order!'](#)

Two of the speeches delivered at the launch—by former Clerk of the House, Bernie Wright (himself one of the project's biographical subjects), and by Stephen Wilks—are reproduced below.

Bernie Wright:

'Order, Order!' is welcome because its stories about the sixty-five key office holders of the House of Representatives are so informative and so interesting. It is also welcome in another way: members' responsibilities for the nation's present and for its future have always, I suggest, allowed little time for public reflection on the House's own history. So, *'Order, Order!'* is doubly welcome because it should encourage what we might call institutional reflection.

Before returning to *'Order, Order!'* I would like to reflect—in a parliamentary way of course—on the roles of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks. Their work matters because the work of the House matters—and they are at the heart of that work. They are not political leaders, but they are leaders within the institution. They help shape its framework, and in a sense they are also followers. These perspectives can be seen repeatedly from 1901 to the present.

In the first Parliaments, the Speakers, Chairmen of Committees, and Clerk played leading roles in the development of standing orders and in the application of constitutional provisions to the House. They laid solid foundations.

In the decades that followed the expanding role of the national government saw the holders of these offices involved in the necessary evolution and adaptation of House practice.

So it has been in our own time—changing needs, responses and adaptation.

The introduction of televising in 1991 took the Parliament into the homes of the nation. This was intended. What was not foreseen was the full impact televising was to have on the dynamic of the House and therefore on the work of its Speakers.

Televised question time attracted quite a following. This was long before the rise of social media—people wrote in. Few did so to express their admiration, and drafting responses to these letters became something of a minor industry.

Successive Speakers felt criticism of the House keenly because, although they were acutely aware of its shortcomings, they also knew that goodwill and cooperation characterised the great majority of its work (around 60 per cent of bills used to be passed with the support of both sides and it is probably similar now). They also knew that public recognition of that work mattered.

Successive Speakers and Clerks encouraged reform, for example in the consideration of legislation, in the development of a committee system, and in the provision of better opportunities for private Members.

In other matters existing practice has been strengthened. For example, during minority government in 2010–13, early precedents on the casting vote were dusted off, studied, explained to Members, and applied with absolute consistency. It was welcome certainty in uncertain times.

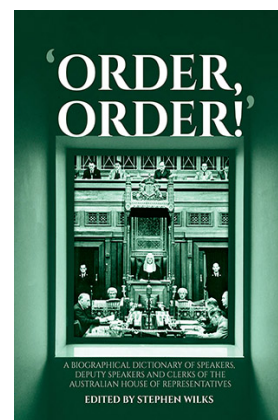
In fact, during those years, the casting vote was not given as often as might have been expected. This was precisely because if calculations showed a vote would be tied, measures could be adjourned, rather than being lost on a (predictable) casting vote. These were technical matters, but they were first order matters with regard to the integrity of the Speakership and of House procedures.

In our time practice on the financial initiative has also been affirmed and developed. Speakers have been vigilant in safeguarding the rights of the House in relation to the Senate in respect of Section 53 of the Constitution. These matters can also be very technical, but they too are critical in our system of government, of compliance with the terms of our Constitution.

[Edmund Barton's](#) statement during the Convention debates remains relevant: 'If government is finance and finance is government, these clauses are amongst the most important'. These matters might be treats in store for you, Mr Speaker.

Speakers have been thoughtful students of House of Representatives Practice. One confessed to taking a copy to the beach during the summer break. I must be discreet so I will just note that she didn't tell me whether she had enjoyed it.

The work of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks has long extended beyond procedural and management matters, for example, in helping strengthen democratic institutions in developing countries. In 2016 the Clerk's Office arranged a program for Deputy Speakers from the Pacific. Dates had long been agreed when the election was called. Nevertheless, as you would expect, the show went on—in fact two former Speakers joined the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker as presenters—and it is not the only time such welcome help has been given.



Our Speakers as well as their Deputies and House staff are highly regarded by their international peers for their support of such initiatives. They are valued as respectful and constructive contributors.

Speakers have often been generous in thanking staff for their efforts. May I also express my warm thanks, and the thanks of all Clerks and staff, for the support of the Speakers and Deputy



A 'presiding' of Speakers past and present at the launch of 'Order, Order!' (Christine Fernon)
From left to right: David Hawker, Speaker 2004-07; Stephen Martin, Speaker 1993-96; Tony Smith, Speaker 2015-21; Bronwyn Bishop, Speaker 2013-15; Milton Dick, Speaker, 2022- ; Sharon Claydon, Deputy Speaker 2022- ; Anna Burke, Speaker 2012-13; Bruce Scott, Deputy Speaker 2012-

Speakers with whom we have had the pleasure of working. We also acknowledge the great work of their spouses.

May I also express my gratitude to the former Clerks with whom my contemporaries and I had the privilege of working. We saw in them the personal and professional qualities that earned them such widespread respect and even affection.

This project has been a collaboration between our national parliament and our national university.

We are indebted to David Elder for initiating it, to Catherine Cornish and her colleagues for carrying it forward so successfully, and to Claressa Surtees and her team for managing these later stages.

We thank Dr Stephen Wilks of the ANU for his leadership and his personal contributions. We thank our thirty-six biographers. Speakers are accustomed to being in the spotlight, but the light shone by our volunteers has been of a more considered kind. Most of them are also volunteers for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, where the strict rule is that only the dead can be included. It is comforting that nobody has had to die to win entry into this volume, isn't it?

Our Parliaments, whatever may be said about them, are worthy of serious study. 'Order, Order!' will reward all who invest a little time studying it. Its stories of sixty-five people remind us that in essence our Parliaments are not buildings, but groups of people, each with their share of strengths and weaknesses, idealism and pragmatism, and so on. It also reminds us of two cases where a son has followed his father. Might we look forward to a daughter following her mother in one of these offices?

'Order, Order!' will help Speakers of the future, and their Deputies, to see their work in a wider context. They will see that they too will

have opportunities to earn the confidence of Members and respect more widely.

Clerks of the future will also see their work in a wider context. They too will have their opportunities, not the least being the opportunity to work with and lead committed, professional and enthusiastic staff colleagues.

Our warm congratulations to all who have worked so successfully to bring us 'Order, Order!' It may even go on to join the exclusive ranks of books about Parliament honoured by a visit to the beach during a summer break.

Stephen Wilks:

Thank you all so much for attending, particularly those who contributed to producing 'Order, Order!' There are too many to name all of you, but I will mention Catherine Cornish, formerly of the Department of the House of Representatives. And I must also sadly mention a contributor who died recently: Peter Love of Swinburne University. And of course my wife, Jen, who is also here today.

Now, we also have as we know quite a number of Speakers in attendance, former Speakers and a current Speaker, not to mention Deputy Speakers and a Second Deputy Speaker.

Possibly—I'll have to check this—this is parliament's greatest ever assemblage of presiding officers.

And I'm sorry to report that I've been gazumped on the line about what is an appropriate collective noun for presiding officers. But I can suggest perhaps a 'presiding' of Speakers, or an 'order' of Speakers?

Very unfashionably, let me salute all parliamentarians and DHR staff here with us for something you share with the sixty-five figures in 'Order, Order!'; a choice of career in public service.

The sixty-five covers only those who are not currently active in parliament, so sorry, to those of you who have missed out. And no doubt we've made the odd error, so sorry again!

I confess I have a few favourites amongst the sixty-five. One is John McGregor, Clerk for a few weeks in 1927, hitherto known only for the fact that he was the one who had a fatal seizure in the Chamber right in front of the budget speech on the first working day of the new parliament in Canberra. Earle Page, whom I've written about, and Neville Howse attended to him, the two doctor members. Considered to be a very bad omen, I wanted to try and bring John McGregor back and give him a fuller life in that sense. I did that entry myself, I confess.

Now, 'Order, Order!' is a work of collective biography as history. History is the most fundamental of disciplines. For example, awareness of history is the basis of the conventions which underlie the functioning of the three parliamentary offices that we mark today.

One last thought. Outside the Australian War Memorial stands a statue of [John Monash](#), only recently erected. Nothing odd about a Monash statue right there. Except that he is in civilian garb; he is holding not a weapon but a book; he is gazing purposely towards this very parliament; and the punch line is the inscription, a quote from Monash himself: 'The only hope for Australia is the ballot box and an educated public'. Two concepts to which I hope 'Order, Order!' will make a small contribution to.

Thank you all again.

BIOGRAPHY: AN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Tom Griffiths launches Melanie Nolan's new book

On 31 May 2023 Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths launched Professor Melanie Nolan's *Biography: An Historiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023) in the RSSS Building at the ANU.

It's a great pleasure and honour to be invited to launch Melanie Nolan's new book, *Biography: An Historiography*. A landmark work in itself, it carries the additional cachet of being written by the current General Editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and the Director of the National Centre of Biography. So here we have the leader of our nation's magnificent collaborative enterprise in biography considering the craft of biography as practised and debated in the Western world across two centuries. Previous General Editors of the *ADB* reflected on many occasions and with distinction on the biographical art, but none wrote a philosophical, international, synthetic work of this scale. Thus we are fortunate indeed to have not only a comparative study of biographical practice, but a grand view from the helm of that great ship of state, the *ADB*.

General Editors of the *ADB*—of whom Melanie is only the sixth in more than six decades and now the longest serving one—have always been historians as well as biographers. Most of them were historians first and biographers second. Melanie is such a one; she is first and foremost, I think, a labour historian. Her 2005 book entitled *Kin* was a collective biography of a New Zealand working-class family in which she studied each of five siblings in turn, to illuminate neglected aspects of working-class life. In that book, biography was the historical tool and ethnographic method with which she illuminated human society. She is well-poised, then, to cast both an insider's and an outsider's eye upon the craft of biography. The relationship between history and biography, and between historians and biographers, is at the heart of this book.

It is also a relationship that goes to the heart of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* itself. The *ADB*, now sixty-six years old, was founded by historians in the Research School of Social Sciences, and it is still there, happily nested in the School of History. It has valiantly withstood occasional corporate university pressures to identify and fund itself differently. It has stood up for cross-university collaboration, for the highest standards of

scholarship, and for public service. That it remains so strong today and is still affiliated with History is a triumph. Melanie came to the General Editorship fifteen years ago, in the wake of a report commissioned by the Research School that had been expected in some quarters to wind the *ADB* down. But led by economist Bob Gregory, the report committee found the *ADB* to be a remarkably productive academic outfit, and one held in universal esteem, especially beyond this university. It is indeed 'a jewel in the crown of the ANU'. So the 2007 Gregory Report, to the surprise of those who commissioned it (and who, to their great credit, accepted its findings), recommended the elaboration and strengthening of the biographical research enterprise within ANU as part of the School of History. Melanie was given the task to make this happen—to be General Editor of the *ADB* and to establish a National Centre for Biography. To promote biography as a central historical methodology and to develop courses in biography as part of the teaching of History.

Now this institutional background is relevant to this occasion because Melanie's book is not only an extension of her lifelong academic interest in biography, it is also an impressive realisation of her institutional mission. This book doesn't just argue for the integration of history and biography; it enacts it chapter by chapter. In this way, I see it as a double achievement. This is Melanie Nolan's vision of biography, and it is also her working credo.

Biographers, she notes early in the book, have often been unreflective about their theories and methodologies, sometimes aggressively so. Melanie recalls how, as a postgraduate student writing a biography, she was told to



Professor Melanie Nolan with her book, *Biography: An Historiography* (Christine Fernon)

BIO: AN HISTORIGRAPHY (CONT'D)

wear her theory 'lightly on her sleeve'. On her sleeve: that is, I suppose, on the surface, something one might easily shrug off. But Melanie is very comfortable with theory and method—indeed, she is hungry for it—and this book makes reflective



Dr Carolyn Rasmussen at the launch of *Biography: An Historiography* (Christine Fernon)

practice its focus by surveying a series of debates amongst historians about biography over two centuries.

So we are invited to consider seven critical debates: about the significance of individuals (or heroism) in history, about tensions between art and science in the writing of biography, about psychobiography, about Marxism, contingency and causation, about the challenge of prosopography and studying collective lives, about the late-twentieth-century fascination with microhistory, and about current developments in life writing. Along the way we meet, of course, G. M. Trevelyan, Thomas Carlyle, Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry, Henry Adams, Sigmund Freud, Lucien Febvre, Lyndal Roper, E. P. Thompson, Clare Anderson, Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Zemon Davis, Linda Colley, Manning Clark, Jill Ker Conway, Barbara Caine, Carolyn Steedman and many, many others. And we do not just meet these names as cited authors but as people with biographies, whose lives at a desk embraced other lives across time. When, for example, Melanie turns her attention to Carlo Ginzburg's famous microhistory, *The Cheese and the Worms*, we learn not only about Ginzburg and his other works, but of the life of his historical subjects and a history of the archives upon which he draws.

Thus this book is a kind of collective intellectual biography, of people who built their lives on contesting ideas, whose writings found resonances across generations and whose genealogies were professional and academic, one becoming the supervisor of the next, who mentored the next, who became critic of the next, all hammering out concepts across time. That's the world we work and write in, at its best.

As Melanie guides us through these myriad debates, she allows us to feel a sturdy respect for old-fashioned empiricism, the ever-present ballast in the historian's ship as it sails the stormy seas of theory. A ballast that gives stability and

courage. Empiricism—a commitment to the possibility that there is a past world that we can recover through exhaustive research and a faith that our quest for truth might advance through study and debate—that empirical stance seems to have made historians in the book not defensive but open-minded, even able to be theoretically promiscuous. The final sentence in the book is simple and clear: 'Empiricism', concludes Melanie, 'has served historians writing biography well.'

Her constant attention to two centuries of intellectual history enables her to argue that there has been too much emphasis in recent years on the idea that biography went out of favour among historians in the twentieth century and that 'the biographical turn' is a dramatic development of recent times. Biography supposedly went out of fashion because of various academic influences: the professionalisation of history around the science of the document over a century ago, the rise of Marxist and materialist history with its emphasis on social structures, the formation of the French *Annales* school with its focus on cliometrics, geography and sociology, and the arrival of poststructuralism, the linguistic turn and the death of the author. Thus, argues Melanie, 'historians have been written out of much of the literary analysis of the evolution of biography'. Here it is good to see the historian fighting back, showing how generations of historians have elegantly surfed the waves of biographical debate, harnessing their energy for reflective historical practice and sometimes turning them to new shores. 'The biographical turn' is not new, argues Nolan, but rather, it voices different inflections of recurring debates which have always been at the centre of history.

It turns out, Melanie suggests, that there was not a mid-twentieth-century abandonment of biography by historians. And well may she argue that, steeped as she is in the history of the *ADB* which was born in the 1950s and was committed then as now to innovative historical practice. Right now, for example, under Melanie's leadership, the *ADB* is embarked upon several challenging methodological enterprises. Let me mention just three. There is what we call the Revisions Project: the rewriting of biographies first penned half a century ago. How do we do so with respectful archaeological layering of interpretations, while drawing on new archives and changing perspectives? There is the Colonial Women Project, to enable the *ADB* to be illuminated by a generation of new social and feminist scholarship. And there is the Indigenous Biography Project, led by Indigenous scholars around the country, aiming to boost the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives in the national biographical dictionary. This project is not just filling in lamentable gaps; it also promises a revolution in how we write biography in this country, how we imagine and describe an Australian life.

Melanie of course invokes [Keith Hancock](#) in her book, as I am also bound to do. First chair of the editorial board of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and founding Director of the Research School of Social Sciences, Hancock was more at home with biography than he was with the social sciences. I think the *ADB* helped reconcile him intellectually to life in this

HTAA CONFERENCE

interdisciplinary research school. I think he felt that a school of history with a biographical enterprise at the heart of it had a better chance of withstanding the ebbs and flows of fashion in the burgeoning social sciences. Not spurning those fashions but entering into them with disciplinary rigour and confidence.

Melanie has given us a generous work of scholarship, one that has a wide canvas and is driven by intelligent curiosity. It will, as she intends, lend itself to teaching; it will inspire further reading. Each chapter ends, not only with detailed references blessedly at hand, but with a useful section on recommended further reading.

A full work on historiography is a landmark moment in our discipline. It doesn't happen often enough in Australia. There is gravity in such a subject and munificence too. Here is a rich, layered, archaeological study of the art and craft and science of biography by a scholar who has a unique overview of the practice in Australasia today. Thank you, Melanie, for your dedication and your industry. How on earth you have managed to write this long, deeply researched book considering the strategic and administrative workload you carry every day, I do not know! Melanie patiently awaited her

essential period of study leave which came due in early 2020, but when she walked out the door of her university office she found that everyone else followed her, as the world went into retreat with the Covid-19 pandemic. The best and worst time to have a study break. Still, it served its purpose. And she planted trees while she wrote: trees for loved ones and trees for trees' sake, a glorious botanic garden flourishing in the Australian bush. A biodiversity of trees, classified and clustered, ordered and rampant, their green fuses let loose to climb to the sky. Her book has the same creative diversity, the same sense of energy released: a collective biography, a tapestry of ideas, generations of debate, cycles and growth, an organic whole.

Congratulations, Melanie! And congratulations to the *ADB* and the School of History and the ANU for nurturing this admired scholar and academic leader! It is my pleasure and honour to launch *Biography: An Historiography*.

Tom Griffiths is an Emeritus Professor of History in the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU and Chair of the ADB Editorial Board.

The *ADB* as a teaching and learning tool

On 6 October 2023, Dr Emily Gallagher and Dr Sam Furphy hosted a workshop at the History Teachers' Association of Australia's annual conference, which was held at various locations in Canberra, including the ANU. The aim of the workshop was twofold: to introduce teachers to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and provide an overview of its history and future trajectory, and to consider the ways in which the *ADB* could be made a more accessible and useful resource for teachers in the classroom. Of course, many of those present were at least partly familiar with the *ADB*, but the fact that more could be done to promote its use in the classroom was confirmed at the workshop.

Sam gave an overview of the *ADB*'s history and spoke about current directions including the *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography (IADB)*, Women's Working Party, and the *ADB*'s revisions project. Em then presented a few different ideas about resources that could be developed to improve the use of the *ADB* as a teaching and learning resource in schools, particularly through the provision of worksheets or project-based activities that aligned with the national curriculum. A productive and lively conversation ensued.

Em also compiled a list of 'curious and iconic' lives for circulation at the conference, including entries on people such as [Mungo Lady and Mungo Man](#), convict girl escapee [Mary Bryant](#), imposter [Arthur Orton](#), Seventh-day Adventist prophet [Ellen Gould White](#), Wankatha woman [Lallie Matbar](#), inventor of the Chiko roll [Frank McEncroe](#), husband-wife telepathy team [Sydney and Lesley Piddington](#), cricketer [Stanley McCabe](#) (who died while trying to dispose of a possum from a cliff near his Mosman home), and fraudster [John Friedrich](#).

In response to the feedback from the workshop, Em and Sam have developed two proposals. The first is to approach the editors of various state history teachers' magazines to explore the possibility of publishing selected *ADB* entries as part of a regular series in their magazines. The key objective would be to improve the use of the *ADB* among teachers by making relevant entries that connect directly to the curriculum more accessible to them.

The second proposal coming out of the conference would involve working with the Indigenous Working Party and other scholars to develop a student research project and/or lesson plan relating to Indigenous resistance fighters and warriors that could be used when teaching the history of the Frontier Wars. Many teachers at the conference were interested in resources that can support them to teach Indigenous history, particularly the invasion and colonisation of Australia and the ongoing campaign for Indigenous rights. Over the last few years the *IADB* has published several new entries on Aboriginal resistance fighters and warriors, such as [Kudajarn](#) (c1845–1905), [Multuggerah](#) (c1820–c1846) and [Billy Barlow](#) (c1825–1860). The main aim of this proposal would be to ensure that more young people across Australia learn about their stories and history.

The work of the *ADB* does not end with the publication of an entry and these two proposals are intended as forms of important public outreach that will contribute to the historical literacy and education of Australian school students.

Dr Emily Gallagher and Dr Sam Furphy are historians at the National Centre of Biography and research editors for the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

Melanie Nolan launches a new special issue of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* on convict history

On 20 July 2023, at the 'Convict Lives: Biography in a Digital Age' symposium in Canberra, Professor Melanie Nolan launched a special issue of *Australian Journal of Biography and History* (AJBH), co-edited by Dr Malcolm Allbrook and Matthew Cunneen.



Matt Cunneen holding a copy of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* No. 7, which he co-edited with Malcolm Allbrook (left), 20 July 2023 (Christine Fernon)

Since 2018 the National Centre of Biography has hosted and supported the *AJBH*, which is published by ANU Press. Malcolm was the augural editor and it is a testament to his tireless work and dedication that it has thrived over the last few years. Under his editorship, the journal has been putting the spotlight on historians' biographical practices in their many guises. Malcolm has also sought to bring the journal into conversation with various NCB research projects by way of special numbers on a specific theme. The *AJBH* No. 7 is a marvellous example of the opportunities offered by a thematic approach. The motivation for a dedicated issue on convict lives stems from a research dilemma regularly faced by research editors at the NCB: the lack of *ADB* articles on convicts, which the 'First Three Fleets and Their Families' project is setting out to remedy. A group of postgraduate students at the NCB are also doing important work on convicts.

Malcolm and Matt have brought together a wonderful bumper issue with ten articles and an introduction. The latter is more than a simple introduction and skilfully surveys the historiography on convicts and its long history from the first novelised accounts in the nineteenth century. Beyond giving a sense of unity and coherence to the issue, Malcolm and Matt provide an overview of the state of the field, offering an important guide to anyone starting out in convict history.

The collection showcases unity and diversity. Convict history, as forced labour and as the foundational event in Australia's

colonial history, is shown to be dynamic and diverse. On one hand, it showcases a range of current projects on convict history around the country; there are in fact several clusters and research projects relating to convict history being pursued by university-based historians and various citizen historian communities. And, although these groups might tend to approach convict history in different ways, they are brought together in this special issue in a way that allows us to see their common cause.

The issue also provides an introduction into a range of methodological approaches to studying convict history. While nearly half the articles are written by scholars associated with the NCB/ADB, they too vary in their approaches.

The collaborative approach that characterises a great deal of convict history is also on display. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart's 'Founders & Survivors: Australian Life Courses in Historical Context' was one of the first collaborative projects in the new digital age. This wonderful partnership between academics, non-academic researchers and archivists has been recording and studying the population of Tasmania. It has since had a number of convict history spin-offs. One of these is the 'SHIPS Project', led by historian Janet McCalman and demographer Rebecca McKibbin. As Janet explains in her article, it was designed to produce a large prosopographical sample of the Tasmanian convict population, built from the transcription of convict records and wider genealogical and historical research.

The issue also contains a multi-authored article by Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, David Roberts and Mark Maclean, who consider digital collections and analysis of records. Elsewhere, Richard Tuffin, Martin Gibbs, David Roe and Sylvana Szydzik pursue a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to place and space.

In her article, Monika Schwarz, an archaeologist and researcher at Monash University's SensiLab, considers collective resistance networks in female factories in colonial Australia. It is part of a larger international digital history project exploring the impact of radicals and rebels transported as political convicts to Australia on their place of exile, and considers patterns of collective resistance by unfree convict women and the exploitation of their forced labour.

Another biographical inspired project relating to convicts is 'The First Three Fleets and Their Families', led by the NCB's outgoing online manager Christine Fernon. The project, which Christine discusses in her article, involves examining the lives of 4,500 people who set off from England to New South Wales in 1787–91 and their descendents over two generations.

There is another University of Tasmania node. Kristyn Harman, who is currently the Chair of the *ADB*'s Tasmanian Working Party, has worked extensively on the history of

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convicts, particularly Indigenous convicts—Australian, Khoian and Māori—and, together with Anthony Ray, she has approached convict recidivism biographically and through family formation. Their subjects are convicts of colour, as is Matt Cunneen's. In his article, Matt reconstructs the lives of three former slave convicts to explore how collective or group biography can be used alongside other methodologies common to convict history.

The remaining articles are written by Patricia (Trish) Downes,

conclusion. In the twentieth century there has been a search, almost millenarian, for a 'perfect' historical method. But, as many of the articles show, each method has its own limitations and opportunities, be they individual, digital or even mixed. They also make a case for a more multifaceted approach that combines different methods, even as many of the authors recognise that in the end archives do constrain their ambitions.

The fragmentary nature of the record, as Malcolm and Matt



Some attendees of the symposium on convict lives at the ANU, 20 July 2023 (Christine Feron)

Jennifer Brookes and Jennifer Bird. Trish approaches convict history by way of considering misbehaving troops and their officers while Brookes and Bird are inspired by family history. Jenni Bird initially began researching the recidivist convict Robert Edward Knox when she believed he was part of her children's genealogy. Even after she discovered there was no biological connection, she continued her investigation, and her article explores what his life and relationships might tell us about the convict penal system. In her article, Jennifer Brookes builds on the work of her father, genealogist Laurence Halloran, to examine the life of Lydia Ann (Anna) Hall, the long-term partner of their forebear Laurence Hynes Halloran, who was convicted of forgery in 1818.

There are many wonderful conversations being conducted in this number. For instance, Kristyn and Anthony's article tests Janet McCalman's thesis about the importance of begetting progeny as a marker of a successful life. The corollary of this is Janet's argument that losing family was a significant setback; indeed, what set these convicts apart from their peers was the fracturing of their family and its household by premature death, desertion and delinquency. Elsewhere, Jennifer Brookes substantiates the theme Janet introduces about the significance of the loss of the breadwinner.

Together this issue reaches a sober and reflective

note, means that only vestiges of the past events remain.

The archives of convict Australia are not and were never intended to be biographical and leave lacunae that are difficult, often impossible, to fill, most of the individual records paying scant attention to lives before contact with the system or after release.

On the other hand, as Hamish, David and Mark argue, you also need to read big data deeply and critically. In the making of records, power relations, especially the role of the state, have shaped the archive in all kinds of ways.

Convict experience was complex and varied. Not all convicts suffered at the hands of the penal system. While many might not have married and had families, many ate well and lived long lives. At the end of the day, averages and stereotypes tells us little. We need to examine real lives and cohorts and, as the 'articles in this issue' seek to do, 'reclaim the humanity and life stories of Australia's convicts'.

Professor Melanie Nolan is Director of the National Centre of Biography and General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

*This article is an edited version of a speech delivered at the launch the *AJBH* No. 7 on 20 July 2023.

CONVICT LIVES SYMPOSIUM

Matt Cunneen reflects on the 'Convict Lives' symposium

It was the result of more than a year of hard work and collaboration. On Thursday 20 July, the National Centre of Biography hosted one of the largest gatherings of historians and practitioners of convict Australia since the pandemic. Among them were several well-known scholars from across the country. Their attendance, as speakers and discussion group leaders, greatly enriched the day's proceedings.

The symposium had a very particular purpose and origin. A few weeks earlier Number 7 of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* had been published. Co-edited by Malcolm Allbrook and myself, it was a special issue on 'Convict Lives', and it was this theme that also formed the basis for the symposium. The issue featured nine articles and two research notes from a staggering nineteen contributors. Each of these pieces exhibits a different mode of employing convict lives in historical research and writing, and powerfully shows how various biographical methodologies can be used by historians of convict Australia. The symposium was designed to stimulate further conversation about future research directions centred on biographical approaches to studying convict lives in the digital world.

As the symposium's co-convenors, Malcolm and I presented the first address of the day, introducing the story of the special issue's creation and outlining the agenda. We were followed by Professors Frank Bongiorno and Melanie Nolan, who offered dedications to the late Patricia Downes and Babette Smith, respectively. Trish, as she was known to her friends and colleagues, was a HDR student at the ANU School of History and a contributor to the issue. Next was the keynote address for the symposium, which was delivered by Janet McCalman. Speaking on the 'SHIPS Project'—a subsidiary project of 'Founders & Survivors'—which documented the lives of 25,000 Tasmanian convicts, Janet discussed the relationship between the micro and the macro in convict history.

As Janet pointed out, increased access to archival sources made possible by digitisation has allowed the convicts as a population to be revealed through the reconstitution of individual lives. The importance of this, she argued, was that it allows for greater insight into who the convicts were, how they shaped the development of Australia, and the role of the state in their lives. Rounding out the morning's proceedings was a shorter presentation from David Roberts, who set the tone for further discussion by outlining the history of biographical writing in Australian convict history. He argued that by and large biographies of individual convicts have been a relatively unpopular genre of historical writing. Those that have been written have tended to centre on a select cohort of prominent, mostly male, convicts.

Following the return from a short morning tea break, the day resumed with a presentation from Hamish Maxwell-Stewart. Complementing David's talk on biography, Hamish's paper focused on the role of digital technology. Hamish articulated that there are great strides yet to be made in convict history in the digital world. He identified record linkage, digital

mapping, network analysis, and training and engagement as particularly fruitful areas. From here, the day was split into two sessions, organised thematically on the role of biography and life stories in Australian convict history, and of digital technology in the same.

To explore these topics, attendees were divided into four groups, which each engaged in discussions about various matters specific to each group. Some of the prompts given to guide these discussions included the place of family history in Australian convict history, how understanding the convict experience centres on researching pre- and post-sentence lives, and the importance of narrative and story-telling as devices for revealing things about convict history not otherwise possible from other readings of the archives.

Rounding out the first half of the day was a formal launch of the journal's special issue by Melanie. She had initially had the idea of assembling the special issue and later inviting me to co-edit it, for which I am very grateful. Melanie diligently summarised the journal's contents and the nature of the contribution of the articles and research notes contained in it. Each contributor who was present received a printed copy before everyone broke for a lunch break.

The last session of the day, again mirroring the duality of biography and the digital in Australian convict history, focused on all things digital: advances in archival access and usability, digital research technologies, and more. It began with a panel where I discussed with David, Monika, and Richard their understanding of how digital technology has shaped what is possible with Australian convict history research, as well as what projects have been done recently using these new technologies. The day ended with one final group discussion.

Thanks to the fantastic work of Erika McGown, from the CASS Communications and Marketing department, most of the symposium was filmed. It can be [viewed for free online](#). The symposium has a success and helped to elevate the position of the National Centre of Biography as a place for Australian convict history research.

Matthew Cunneen is a PhD candidate in the NCB whose thesis focuses on the lives of convicts who departed Australia. For the past two years, he has worked as a research editor for the Australian Dictionary of Biography.



Symposium attendees (including Malcolm Allbrook and Kristyn Harman on the left) in a discussion group, 20 July 2023 (Christine Fernon)

FRAGMENTED LIVES

Matthew Cunneen discusses his film project on convict lives

Two great initiatives emerged from the June 2023 'Convict Lives' special issue (Number 7) of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*. The first, described in the preceding pages, was the symposium held on 20 July. The other, which is currently still in progress, is the creation of a film project, titled 'Fragmented Lives: Biography in Australian Convict History'.



Still frame from interview with Hamish Maxwell-Stewart for *Fragmented Lives* (Eleanor List)

Intended for a general audience, the film project will be published on the National Centre of Biography's website and The Australian National University's YouTube channel. Its purpose is specific: to help generate further interest among the general public about the special issue, the conversations that were had during the symposium, and convict history research being conducted by scholars and postgraduate students at the NCB.

The film project originated in the weeks leading up to the symposium. With so many academics and historians travelling interstate to attend, it struck me that the event offered many opportunities beyond its original purpose. To make the most of this symposium, I planned to arrange for a recording of the day, capturing guest speakers and presentations. Time was short and I approached independent filmmaker and director Eleanor List to see if she would join me on this project. She agreed to do so.

With a background in independent filmmaking, and an honours degree in screenwriting and children's television at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Eleanor was well positioned to lead this initiative. She was able to combine high-level educational concepts with traditional storytelling techniques, and her previous work has typically focused on creating content with educational benefits—such as through

short films—and involved her interest in history.

With Professor Melanie Nolan's support, Eleanor joined me on this project as director and leader of the creative vision. Her participation and support have provided much vitality to the project, and she has helped bring our ideas to fruition at each stage of the process.

Over an intense two days of filming, Eleanor, myself and Erika McGown, from CASS Communications and Marketing—who generously lent her time, assistance and equipment—set about filming interviews with many of the journal's contributors, including those who were in Canberra to attend the symposium. We asked our guests questions about everything from their latest research to their thoughts on convict biography and future directions for convict research. Hearing these experts speak with such ease and passion about their research and areas of expertise was an unforgettable experience.

The project has now moved into the post-production stage and the interviews we filmed are currently being reviewed for significant and

interesting snippets that can be collated for the final product. Eleanor and I envisage the footage being adapted into an online mini series, consisting of around four episodes of 8–10 minutes in length.

These episodes will likely have a thematic dimension to them, and we intend to mix the interview footage with images of artworks, historical documents and reenactment footage. Through the generous support of Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, who was one of the interview participants, we were put in touch with Roar Film, a film production company based in Hobart, who have created a substantial amount of convict reenactment footage for other past projects. They have kindly agreed to be involved with this project by contributing some of this footage to enliven the video series.

While the project has some progress yet to be made before it is complete, we are incredibly excited about the possibilities ahead of us. We are also immensely grateful to Melanie, who has pledged some funding to support this initiative. Eleanor and I are looking forward to the opportunity to share the final product with the NCB/ADB community.

Matthew Cunneen is a PhD candidate in the NCB whose thesis focuses on the lives of convicts who departed Australia. For the past two years, he has worked as a research editor for the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

INDIGENOUS RECOGNITION

The Quest for Indigenous Recognition



Left to right: Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths, Professor Melanie Nolan, Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna, Hon Linda Burney MP, Julian Leeser MP, Professor Peter Yu at the launch of the website, 11 September 2023 (Christine Fernon)

Earlier this year, members of the *ADB*'s Editorial Board invited historians and other prominent Australians to explain key historical events in the long journey to the 2023 Referendum on the Voice. The aim of the project was to provide well-informed and reliable historical information that is easily accessible online, and serves as an important educational tool to better inform all Australians who seek to understand the long struggle for Indigenous rights. Each event is linked to relevant documentary, audio and visual sources, as well as biographical articles in the *ADB* of associated subjects.

The Quest for Indigenous Recognition project offers concise interpretations of twenty-three key events in the history of Indigenous rights. It was intentionally selective, and as we move beyond the referendum, it will be regularly updated. The events described are not the only examples of Indigenous Australians petitioning for their rights, but they are certainly among the most pivotal since the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901. While there were also many statements, petitions, ceremonies and peace negotiations before 1901, this website covers the federal period between the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901 and the present.

On 11 September 2023 the Hon Linda Burney MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians, launched *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition* project at Parliament House. Other speakers included Ngambri-Ngunnawal custodian Paul House, Mr Julian Leeser MP, Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths, and Professor Peter Yu AM.

Introducing the project at Parliament House, Professor Melanie Nolan explained that *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition* was an initiative of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*) and the National Centre of Biography in the School of History at the ANU.

The project is core business for the *ADB*, which aims to be a mirror to Australian society. We intend for all Australians to see themselves in its pages. This means concerning ourselves with representation of Indigenous people and their history. This project involves historians engaging with the referendum on the Voice in a biographical way. The Voice is about constitutional recognition for First Nations Australians and the website (which Linda Burney so kindly agreed to launch) reminds us that there have been many calls for constitutional recognition since 1901.

The *ADB* has an Indigenous Working Party comprised of over a dozen Indigenous Australian scholars from across the country. Each and every one of them is a volunteer. We are working with Associate Professor Shino Konishi—an Aboriginal Yawuru woman from Broome, now at the Australian Catholic University—who is leading an Australian Research Council-funded project to compile an *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*IADB*). Together with Professor Tom Griffiths and Dr Malcolm Allbrook—and with more funding from ANU and the J.T. Reid Charitable Trusts—they are producing additional entries on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which will redress the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the *ADB*. They are also working on a book, *Reframing Indigenous Lives*, as well as a special

INDIGENOUS RECOGNITION (CONT'D)

volume of Indigenous Australian biographies, which will appear in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

The *ADB* sincerely thanks each of the authors for their contributions to this project, particularly Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna, Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths and Minister Burney. We would like to acknowledge the national cultural institutions including the National Museum of Australia, Museum of Australian Democracy, Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia for their assistance.

Finally, with sadness and hope in our hearts for the future, we would like to acknowledge Indigenous Australians and their supporters who have struggled for their human rights, justice and recognition since the British invasion of Australia began in 1788.

Professor Melanie Nolan is the Director of the National Centre of Biography and General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

*This article is an edited version of a speech that was delivered by Professor Melanie Nolan at the launch for the project at Parliament House.

Further reading

Mark McKenna and Peter Yu, 'Asking Australia for an Indigenous voice isn't new – it's been a long and difficult struggle', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2023.



Ngambri-Ngunnawal custodian Paul House delivering the Welcome to Country, 11 September 2023 (Christine Fernon)



Onlookers at the launch of *The Quest for Indigenous Recognition*, 11 September 2023 (Christine Fernon)
Left to right: Professor Peter Yu, Professor Clare Wright, Stephen Romei, Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna

SEYMOUR LECTURE, 2023

Chris Wallace delivers the Seymour Biography Lecture



Professor Chris Wallace delivering the Seymour Lecture at the National Library of Australia, 2023 (Virginia Haussegger)

'Honouring the Biographer's Contract' sounds dull, doesn't it? The alternative title is 'Biography: Its Part In Our Downfall'. First up, I'm going to invite you to join in a thought experiment...

It's 2053, 30 years hence. To recap, Rupert Murdoch has been dead for 19 years. He passed away peacefully at 103 years old, the same age as his mother, Elizabeth, whom he uncannily resembled, in 2034. I've done the maths: that's a real projection. His estranged wife, Jerry Hall, with whom he reunited, was bedside at his death. Elisabeth Murdoch succeeded her father as the head of News Corporation, and immediately realigned the reporting and commentary of its media outlets with reality. News Corp under Elisabeth Murdoch's leadership has fought the good fight to save Earth for human habitation in the face of accelerating global warming, but she's come to the top job too late. Decades of News Corp gaslighting, literal and figurative, has enabled an exponential rise in temperatures on Earth. Extreme weather events are the new normal, habitat destruction and species extinction is generalised, and homo sapiens are next.

Nicola Forrest—a University of Canberra alum graduating Bachelor of Arts, majoring in economics in 1981—has liquidated her entire Fortescue Metals Group holding. With the proceeds she's bought X, formerly known as Twitter, and SpaceX from Elon Musk in a fire sale after banks and regulators closed in on him over chronic liquidity and governance problems. Forrest renames them XX and SpaceXX. She restores proper labour standards and defeats disinformation on her XX social media platform.

Elisabeth Murdoch and Nicola Forrest have combined forces to evacuate Earth's citizens to Alpha Centauri before we're all wiped out. Murdoch runs the comms on the operation, marshalling support for the exodus and keeping morale up. Forrest runs the evacuation on the SpaceXX fleet. Each country has its own exodus leader linked to the team. In Australia, it's long-serving Prime Minister Tanya Plibersek. In the US, it's President Michelle Obama. Gives you hope, doesn't it? Exodus leadership is not confined to politicians. In Britain, the exodus leader is Tilda Swinton, whom it's generally agreed, people will follow anywhere. And in any

SEYMOUR LECTURE (CONT'D)

case, Tilda's mother is Australian and heaven knows, hybrid vigour is going to be important on Alpha Centauri.

The SpaceX shuttles begin. Shunning SpaceX, and choosing space transport companies run by their libertarian bros instead, Elon Musk, Lachlan Murdoch and their plutocratic peers, struggle to leave Earth in time. These companies' spaceships, put together shoddily by non-union casuals employed through labour hire firms on sub-minimum pay rates, have a high failure rate. Who knew? Musk, Murdoch and friends have to make hard calls about which is riskier: blowing up in one of their libertarian bros' spaceships trying to get to Alpha Centauri, or trying to survive long-term in a subterranean bunker on New Zealand's South Island?

Calculations on whether their cellared pinot noir stocks can last out until the weather improves prove pivotal. After all, global warming, it's just a woke delusion, isn't it? And if you've got enough wine put down, anything's survivable, right?

Writers, artists and musicians are prominent among those shuttled to Alpha Centauri by SpaceX. You can't transplant and rebuild a shattered species on a new planet without a good starter culture. These particular Earth refugees are vital to homo sapiens' future. But what of the past, the recent disastrous past? On Alpha Centauri, the biographers get together. An uncomfortable question arises, did we contribute to this? Is it something we did? Or is it something we didn't do? Did biographers play a role in the downfall of homo sapiens on Earth? The Seymours must be terribly worried at this point. It's going to be fine.

Many Seymour Lecturers have canvassed the ethics of biography and the ethical obligations of biographers, less so its impact and effectiveness. Ethics and ethical obligations are on biographers' minds all the time. Positively, because of its intrinsic importance, and defensively, to avoid legal action, a real and ever-present threat in the work we do. It's one of the conversations that occurs regularly in the Special Collections Room of this building: am I going to get sued? What am I going to do about it? How can I express something that I know to be true without getting sued? It's a key issue. With the thought experiment at the back of our minds, I want to turn to three of my predecessors' lectures: those of Frances Spalding, Ray Monk and Richard Holmes. In her 2010 Seymour Lecture, 'The Biographer's Contract,' the distinguished art historian Frances Spalding, biographer of amongst others Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry and Stevie Smith, conducted an expansive exploration of the literal and figurative dimensions of biographers' contracts. She concluded that '[a]t the heart of the biographer's contract' lies 'the recording of truth and an attempt to commemorate it'. 'Is this still possible in the age of relativism?' Spalding asked, and replied, '[n]ot only possible but urgently needed, for the truths contained in any unpretentious report, be it a record, or a parish outing, or a school report, remain the foundation of all literary endeavour.' I agree with Spalding on this.

I want to draw attention to two particular aspects of the lecture though—one at this point in it, and I think a neglected

one earlier on. Spalding refers to biography as an aspect of literary endeavour, completely understandable given her distinguished position in the canon of English literary biographers and the dominance of literary biography, the life-writing tradition, in English letters. But that's not the only tradition. There's also the historical tradition. For much of the twentieth century, biography occupied an ambivalent position in the discipline of history, something which resolved into a secure position only over the last few decades. Much biography is written by historians and it has properties distinct from that written by biographers working in the literary tradition.

Professor Melanie Nolan, Director of Australia's National Centre of Biography and the current general editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, argues this point strongly. Her new book, *Biography: An Historiography*, makes fascinating reading, which brings me to the second of Frances Spalding's points to which I want to draw attention tonight. As she said in this room all those years ago: 'There is rarely a moment when a biographer is not faced with some kind of responsibility, to the facts, to ethical issues, to the past, the future, one's audience, and to one's craft. The material has to be sifted with intelligent alertness, not just for facts, names, links, and connections, but also for the inner life of one's subject. You need an open mind and an open heart to note with feeling, intellect, and intuition, what is being said, and to hear also the tone of the voice being used.' All true. It's a beautiful encapsulation of the biographer's task, especially as conceived of by a literary biographer.

It segues nicely into Ray Monk's 2014 Seymour Lecture, 'How Can I Be a Logician Before I'm a Human Being? The Role of Biography in the Understanding of Intellectuals.' Monk's lecture focuses on his biography of Cambridge-based Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Duty of Genius*, published in 1990. One of my favourite books. If you haven't read it, do. Follow it up with Benjamin J.B. Lipscomb's *The Women Are Up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionised Ethics*, published last year. Monk's Wittgenstein biography is so good it began what for me came to feel like a personal relationship with Wittgenstein—surprising, since his attitude to women was not very good and I'm a committed feminist. Wittgenstein did rate fellow philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, at first his student, then his lifelong friend and intellectual interpreter. Wittgenstein and Anscombe are buried diagonally adjacent to each other at Ascension Parish Burial Ground, All Souls Lane, Cambridge. When I'm there, I like to visit and spend a few moments with them. After you read Monk's book, perhaps you will too.

Frances Spalding and Ray Monk are very different people. One an art historian, the other a philosopher. Monk, in fact, specialised in the philosophy of mathematics, which he observed in his Seymour Lecture you might think is as removed from biography as possible. Yet the spirit and affect of Spalding's and Monk's biographies—at least as far as Monk's biography of Wittgenstein is concerned—they're very similar, embodying the approach described by Spalding,

which I quoted earlier. Ray Monk had a specific purpose in writing *The Duty of Genius*. In the 1980s he'd worked on Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics and concluded that the interpretations of it dominant at that time, by Michael Dunnett and Chris Binwright, were flat out wrong. 'They,' Monk said, 'seem to me to misunderstand Wittgenstein's work, but...'—and this is crucial—'...misunderstood Wittgenstein's work in a particular kind of way, and it struck me that they'd misunderstood Wittgenstein. Not a case of misunderstanding as it were, the words on the page, but rather a case of misunderstanding the spirit in which Wittgenstein was writing. It's a question of misunderstanding Wittgenstein.'

In writing *A Duty of Genius*, Monk wanted to open up an understanding of Wittgenstein in a way that would allow the Dunnetts and Binwrights of the world to attain a full rather than fallacious understanding of his philosophy of mathematics. Now, a key part of Wittgenstein's philosophy is that understanding consists in seeing connections. Monk proceeds very much in that spirit in his book. Along the way, readers get a good grounding in Wittgenstein's philosophy. An example is the famous duck/rabbit picture from Wittgenstein's work, later published in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Said Monk in his Seymour Lecture: 'The duck rabbit you see is an ambiguous figure. You can see this is a duck on the right-hand side of the picture, as the beak of a duck. Or you could see that bit of the picture as the ears of a rabbit. And you can at will, switch between one and the other. You can see it now as a duck and now as a rabbit. But now ask yourself, "Well, what changes? What changes when you see it now as a duck and now as a rabbit?" In some sense, you're seeing something different. Or rather, you're looking at it differently. And that, Wittgenstein says, is what the philosopher is trying to achieve. The philosopher is trying to get you to see things differently, and that leads him to this notion of the understanding that consists in seeing connections, which was a crucial notion for Wittgenstein.'

Monk then canvassed Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance. Used of course figuratively in philosophy, Monk cleverly explained it to the Seymour audience using a literal example instead: a composite picture, known as a Galtonian photograph, Wittgenstein had made of him and his three sisters superimposed on each other. Ray put this up on the screen and said, '[t]he point Wittgenstein had in mind was to see the connections between himself and his sisters in super imposing one upon the other. You can see in a quite literal sense, the connections. You can see the family resemblances.'

'What does all this have to do with biography?', a relieved audience finally heard Monk ask, right here on that night in 2014 when he delivered his lecture. I know they were relieved. I was in the audience. Said Monk: 'It struck me that in my quest to get across what kind of person he was, so as to enable people to read him as it were in the right spirit, what I had to do was not to theorise about Wittgenstein, but to describe various things that he wrote and that he said, and that the art of biography is to structure those things so the reader now can see the connections, just like

somebody looking at that composite photograph can see the connections.'

I want you to hold that thought about connections. As Wittgenstein put it, the 'kind of understanding that consists in seeing connections.'

Monk argued this is the kind of understanding that Boswell achieved in his famous *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Said Monk: 'Sometimes Boswell's method looks haphazard or random. You don't know why he's suddenly talking about Samuel Johnson talking about actresses or whatever, but there's a method to his madness. And you realise at the end of the book, that what you've been given is a way of looking at Samuel Johnson, a point of view of him. Samuel Johnson now makes sense,' Monk continued, 'and that making sense is not just an accumulation of facts, it's an arrangement of facts, and that, it seems to me, is the art of the biographer. The art of the biographer is to arrange the facts without theorising, without analysing, but arranging them so as to present not just what happened, but a way of seeing a point of view of what happened.'

This would be a good moment to return to the thought experiment I set up at the outset. Is any of this useful in helping the biographers sitting in Alpha Centauri in 2053, looking back at Earth, wondering if something they did or didn't do had contributed to their necessary exodus from an Earth too hot to sustain human life anymore?

I think it is. I think it is in this way. It begs the question, what is it about biography, the way we practise it, that made us miss the connections that led up to and necessitated the exodus in our thought experiment? I'll repeat that, what is it about biography, the way we practise it, that made us miss the connections that led up to and necessitated that exodus? It's not as though related matters have been absent from the genre. Richard Holmes, for example, in his 2008 Seymour Lecture, titled 'Biography: The Past Has a Great Future,' said, '[t]he intensity of concern about the planet, about global and environmental issues, has put the biographical element back into science with a vengeance, leading to an explosion of biographical interest in the creativity of scientists and the historic context of their work.' That included of course, Holmes's own *The Age of Wonder*, published to acclaim that same year. But has it helped us make the connections to stop the catastrophic climate trajectory we're evidently racing along right now, in 2023, evident in extreme weather event after weather event, cunningly rationalised in news reports as 'once in century events,' or 'once in 200 year events,' insinuating they've always happened, and avoiding mention of their escalating frequency? I would say not.

And I return to the questions of our biographers on 2053 Alpha Centauri. Did we contribute to this? Is this something we did? Is it something we didn't do? Did biographers play a role in the downfall of homo sapiens on Earth?

Richard Holmes, in his Seymour Lecture, drew attention to what he described as the great tradition of popular biography, both in Australia and Britain, which he argued, '[h]as proved significant in shaping our national identities, giving us role models, but also questioning the nature of our societies.'

SEYMOUR LECTURE (CONT'D)

I reserve comment to a later date on biography's role in 'shaping our different national identities' and 'giving us role models,' both gigantic topics in themselves. But without delay, I'd like to disagree with Holmes that biography has been effective in questioning the nature of our societies. I would argue that biography—the way it is now written, almost without exception—persistently reinforces the way things are, and that that's a problem, and also that it need not be so.

Ian Donaldson, in his 2006 *Australian Book Review* La Trobe University Annual Lecture, titled 'Matters of Life and Death: The Return of Biography,' gave a wonderful account of five 'anti-biographers' sceptical of the genre.

I'm not an anti-biographer. I'm a biographer who does not want to have to decamp to Alpha Centauri in thirty years time. I've concluded there are things biographers, and historians generally, can and should do to make that avoidable. And I don't mean taking trenchant ideological positions and ramming it down people's throats, something Frances Spalding explicitly cautioned against in her Seymour Lecture. But I've concluded there are things biographers and historians can and should do to do biography better. This won't be popular with biographers, because who likes being shaken out of familiar models and modes?

The first is to do fewer single-subject biographies and more dual and collective biographies. The overwhelming focus on the individualistic heroic quest story in single-subject biographies needs to be supplemented urgently with collective heroic quest stories if we're to get out of the mess we're in. Contrary to dominant media narratives drastically privileging individual freedom over the broad collective good, we will only get out of this mess by working together. Biography needs to show that this has been done and can be done again, rather than cling to and reinforce the model of the compelling individual. David McInnis reviewing Margreta de Grazia's *Shakespeare Without a Life* in the current edition of *ABR*, paraphrases one of her key points beautifully. 'Prior to Romanticism, one had a genius for something; post-Romanticism, it was possible to instead be a genius.' I'll repeat that. 'Prior to Romanticism, one had a genius for something; post-Romanticism, it was possible to instead be a genius.' Romanticism did humankind no favours with that shift. As well as reading de Grazia's terrific book, those interested in this topic will be richly rewarded revisiting Isaiah Berlin's brilliant *The Roots of Romanticism*, in which his 1965 Mellon lectures are published.

The second thing is to look for and include in biographies the 'negative space' of subjects' life stories. Don't just tell us what they did, tell us what your biographical subject failed to do, the consequences of that failure, its relationship to the success and failure of others, and the implications of that for us all.

The third is to include the future in these stories of subjects past and, if still alive, present. That's necessarily speculative. Include alternative speculations and exercise judgement in weighting them on what those 'negative space' issues have led to or not. Looking back from Alpha Centauri, our doleful biographers looked back on the biographies of political

leaders from recent decades, for example. The absence of attempts to see the 'negative space' in their stories, and the failure to make connections between policy failures with a strong 'family resemblance' amongst them, as Wittgenstein would put it, is striking. Had these occlusions been brought to light, there's a greater chance something more could have been done to change path.

Now, is this a biographer's job? To that question I say, if not biographers, who?

And I would enjoin my fellow biographers to reflect on Frances Spalding's observation that '[t]here is rarely a moment when any biographer is not faced with some kind of responsibility to the facts, to ethical issues, to the past, the future, one's audience, and to one's craft.'

Note, '[t]o the past... and the future.' As we seek to better know the past in order to do the future better, biographers need to find ways to honour more completely the 'biographical contract' and play their role more fully too.

Chris Wallace is a Professor at the University of Canberra and until recently was also a Visiting Fellow at the National Centre of Biography.

*This lecture was delivered at the National Library of Australia on 7 September 2023. The live streamed video can be [viewed online on YouTube](#).