

National Centre of Biography, ANU,
ANU College of Law, and
Menzies Australia Institute, King's College London

Ceremonial Lives of the Nation



Stephen Baxter, *The Australian Crowd*, 2014 (courtesy National Centre of Biography)

Tuesday 27 April 2021

[Register here](#)

7pm AEST/10am BST

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Ceremonial Lives of the Nation

Ceremony is an important and public aspect of our social and political lives. This panel discussion will explore the history and contemporary significance of ceremony in three distinct arenas of Australia's national life: citizenship, the honours system, and the swearing-in of new judges. Significant important and contemporary themes traverse and animate these ceremonies, including the relationship between Australia's British heritage and its modern independent nationhood; tensions between diversity and national unity, and between history and modernity; and the politics of Indigenous recognition within the colonial legal system. In different ways, each paper also speaks to who 'counts' in public life; a theme of contemporary interest in both Australian and international contexts.

DR KAREN FOX is a Research Fellow at the National Centre of Biography, and a Research Editor for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, in the School of History at The Australian National University. A historian of Australia and New Zealand, she has published innovative research on the history of official honours in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and is currently completing a book on the history of honours in Australia.

Dr Fox will examine the place of ceremony and ritual in the history of the honours system in Australia, from the extension of awards to the colonies in the nineteenth century to the inclusion of women in the system from 1917, and from the creation of uniquely Australian awards in 1975 to the present day. Drawing on this rich history, she will reflect on the ways that honorific ceremony and ritual express both contemporary ideas of Australian national identity and the country's relationship to its British past.

DR ANNE MACDUFF is a Senior Lecturer at the ANU College of Law. Her research draws upon a range of critical theories, including feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories. She has conducted important research that exposes the largely hidden mechanisms through which Australian law carries on the exclusionary legacy of a 'White Australia.'

Dr Macduff will examine the increasing significance of Australian citizenship ceremonies. She will trace the key changes the Australian government has made to the citizenship ceremony, as it seeks to invest that ceremony with growing importance. Given that only individuals acquiring citizenship by naturalisation are required to attend a citizenship ceremony, Dr Macduff will then explore what the contemporary citizenship ceremony conveys about the meaning of citizenship as a legal status, cultural diversity, and Australian national identity.

DR HEATHER ROBERTS is an Associate Professor at the ANU College of Law. She is the leading and pioneer scholar on judicial swearing-in ceremonies, conducting extensive and ground-breaking archival research into the ways in which these ceremonies record a narrative history and biography of the judiciary.

Dr Roberts will examine a recent shift in judicial swearing-in ceremonies in Australian State and Territory Supreme Courts. An enduring feature of these courts, these ceremonies tell a rich history of Australia's legal and judicial system, and the values and attitudes that underpin it. Largely absent from this history, however, has been reference to Australia's first peoples: the words 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' rarely spoken and their cultures and histories ignored. Dr Roberts will discuss the ways in which Indigenous voices are heard in recent ceremonies, and how this reflects changing understandings of Australia's legal history and the judicial role.

Discussant: PROFESSOR FRANK BONGIORNO AM is Professor of History and Head of the School of History at The Australian National University. An Australian labour, political, and cultural historian, Frank is the author of *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (2012) and *The Eighties: The Decade That Transformed Australia* (2015), and many scholarly articles and book chapters. He is a regular contributor to the media.

Chair: PROFESSOR MARTIN THOMAS, Professor of History at The Australian National University and Co-Director of the Menzies Australia Institute.