



Australian
National
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Biography Footnotes

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National Centre of Biography,
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ANU College of Arts &
Social Sciences

The National Centre of Biography acknowledges, celebrates, and pays our respects to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples of the Canberra region, and to all First Nations Australians on whose traditional lands members of our wider community meet, live, and work.

Cover image: ADB staff Margaret Crago, Sue Edgar, Sally O'Neill, Martha Campbell, Nan Phillips & Dorothy Smith, 1971. Source: ANU Archives.

Biography Footnotes no. 26 was edited by Michelle Staff.



**Australian
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National Centre
of Biography

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From the director's desk

Welcome to Issue 26 of *Biography Footnotes*.

2025 has been an exceptionally challenging year, dominated by the Renew ANU proposals. This posed some very unwelcome stress on NCB staff; although we are now considerably more hopeful, the process of correcting the ANU budget continues, and so future difficulties for the NCB/ADB cannot be ruled out.

I begin by thanking those many ADB stakeholders who lent their support for the Dictionary in response to Renew ANU. To address a significant university-wide deficit, ANU management developed this plan that involved job cuts, restructuring, and budget realignment to save \$250 million by 2026. The related Organisational Change Proposal announced on 3 July 2025 projected that two ADB staff would be made redundant and that our Managing Editor, Dr Malcolm Allbrook (who retired on 4 July) would not be replaced. A very difficult period followed. The ADB featured very prominently in pushback by ANU staff and stakeholders. The Vice-Chancellor's resignation in September signalled some much-needed institutional rethinking. Last month, the Interim Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rebekah Brown, announced that due to 'higher-than-expected voluntary separations, staff attrition, retirements and vacancy management, the University's financial position ha[d] improved'.

As expected from this, the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) Implementation Plan (IP) released on 1 December announced that the proposed disestablishment of occupied positions would not proceed, that is, there would be no further forced redundancies, nor was the School of History going to be renamed the School of History and Biographical Studies. In terms of the NCB/ADB, the CASS IP summarised the feedback it had received to the July proposals: 'Feedback was received, primarily from external stakeholders and ADB volunteers and contributors, noting the national significance and importance of the ADB, particularly in relation to Indigenous engagement. Feedback emphasised that the work of the ADB was already primarily being driven by volunteers, and the loss of two positions identified for disestablishment would significantly impact the ADB. Feedback also questioned the rationale for targeting the ADB for reductions'. We were overwhelmed and moved by the deep support our community expressed for the ADB in opposing the July proposals.

So, while the ADB Managing Editor position will remain disestablished, the threat to make one research editor and our administrator redundant has been withdrawn, which is a relief. The CASS IP also stated: 'In response to philanthropic support, staffing costs, the equivalent of the savings (\$250K pa) will be moved to Philanthropic funding for two (2) years'. We expect to be working through the exact implications of this for some time to come.

While Renew ANU has dominated the year, there has been other and much more welcome news. We had a celebration of Dr Malcolm Allbrook's work at the time of his retirement. Instead of being made redundant, Karen Ciuffetelli celebrated 40 years' service at the ANU. Dr Stephen Wilks put up his hand to act as Managing Editor. Staff have continued to work on core ADB business: research editing ADB articles, developing our new online platform, BIMS 2.0, and revising entries. They have contributed to the public understanding of biography by researching, publishing books and articles, presenting papers, recording podcasts and radio interviews, and attending Biography Workshops. Further, they have taught, coordinated family history workshops, mentored other researchers, and supervised HDR students. Despite Renew ANU we never stopped making plans for curating our work and developing our corpus. You can read more about all these matters in *Biography Footnotes* no. 26.

—Professor Melanie Nolan, NCB Director & ADB General Editor



Melanie Nolan, NCB Director & ADB General Editor. Photo: *The Canberra Times*/Dion Georgopoulos.

ADB news



Nicholas Brown speaking at Pat Clarke's ADB Medal ceremony. Photo: Michelle Staff.

This section reports on matters relating to our flagship project, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and the community it brings together.

Honours

Congratulations to those ADB volunteers — authors, members of working parties, and friends — who have received Australian honours since the last edition of *Biography Footnotes*.

Australia Day Honours 2025:

Member (AM) in the General Division

Professor David HEADON

Honorable Justice Richard REFSHAUGE

Honorable Justice John SACKAR

Ms Margy BURNS

Professor Paul PICKERING

King's Birthday Honours 2025:

Member (AM)

Associate Professor Beverley KINGSTON

Medal (OAM)

Mr Peter BURGIS

Professor Ivor INDYK

Dr Bernard WHIMPRESS

AAH Fellows

In 2025 three members of the *ADB* community were elected as new fellows of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Fellows of this organisation are elected annually through a rigorous nomination and peer assessment process. These three scholars are:

- Professor Katerina Teaiwa, co-chair of the Oceania Working Party.
- Associate Professor Natalie Harkin, First Nations Working Party and *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography* author.
- Professor Gaye Sculthorpe, *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography* author.

Congratulations all on this wonderful achievement!

ADB author deaths

It is with great sadness that we note the deaths that have been reported to us since 25 December 2024:

L. J. (Les) Louis

Peter Burgis

Helen Gregory

Robert J. Rice

Francis West

M. John Thearle

Russell Doust

Janet Doust

Rosslyn Finn

Ian McPhee

Ted Egan

New ADB website going live 2026

We are excited to share that the new *Australian Dictionary of Biography* website will go live next year! Readers of *Biography Footnotes* no. 25 will recall that our web programmer and developer, Howie Chen, has been working on a brand-new updated website which will improve the *ADB*'s digital capabilities and usability. The project is currently at the internal testing and optimisation stage. We look forward to launching the new website by the middle of next year.

BRALM project

The *Biographical Register of the Labour Movement* (BRALM) project is almost complete. Conceived at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, in the late 1980s, the register was brought into the National Centre of Biography in 2011 (see *Biography Footnotes* no. 9). To date over 2,040 entries have been added to *People Australia* by volunteers Dr Chris Cunneen and Christine Fernon, with only 20 or so left to go. Recent entries include the journalist, author, poet, community activist, Communist, and feminist [Justina Williams](#), as well as her two husbands, journalist [Pete Thomas](#) and waterside worker, writer, and trade unionist [Victor Williams](#).

Dr Pat Clarke receives ADB medal

Michelle Staff

The *ADB* is fortunate to have so many longstanding and dedicated volunteers who ensure that all its various parts — from selecting subjects to writing entries and everything in-between — continue to work effectively. The Dictionary's highest honour, the *ADB* Medal, is reserved for a small group of especially significant people without whom it would not be what it is today.

In June one of these medals was awarded to Dr Patricia Clarke for her long and distinguished service to the *ADB*. The presentation was a joyful event held at Pat's home in Deakin and brought together several generations of her family, representatives from the *ADB* and the ANU's School of History, and many of Pat's other colleagues, collaborators, and friends from across the Canberra community.

Former member of the Commonwealth Working Party, Professor Nicholas Brown, paid tribute to the important contributions that Pat has made to that group since its foundation in 1989. Dr Malcolm Allbrook, acting General Editor of the *ADB* during the early part of this year, presented the award on behalf of the Editorial Board.

The citation for Pat's medal captures the many different contributions she has made to the *ADB* over many decades. It reads as follows:

'Dr Patricia Clarke OAM FAHA FFAHS has been a dedicated and longstanding contributor to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* since the 1980s, and to the National Centre of Biography since its formation in 2008. She has given over thirty-five years of generous service to these two institutions and is a deserving recipient of an *ADB* Medal.

A distinguished journalist and a pioneer of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, Pat is also a respected Australian historian, especially in the fields of gender and media history. Among her many monographs are several important biographical studies, including: *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle 1827-1857* (1991), *Pioneer Writer: The Life of Louisa Atkinson, Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist* (1990), *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist* (1999), and *Eilean Giblin: A Feminist Between the Wars* (2013). Her most recent book was *Bold Types: How Australia's First Women Journalists Blazed a Trail* (2022) and she remains actively engaged in biographical research.

Pat has authored fourteen *ADB* entries since 1990. The most recent — on the Canberra historian Patience Wardle (1910-1992) — was published in 2022. Her early contributions were especially important for ensuring the inclusion of women at a time when they comprised less than five per cent of *ADB* entries. All Pat's entries are written with a characteristic flair and are based on meticulous research. They also draw on her wide-ranging knowledge and expertise, from colonial governess migration schemes to political journalism and local community activism. Among her contributions to the *ADB* are entries on the governess, feminist, and author Charlotte Barton (1796-1867), political journalist Jack Commins (1913-1987), and diarist Mary Braidwood Mowle (1827-1857).



Nicholas Brown, Pat Clarke & Malcolm Allbrook, June 2025. Photo: Michelle Staff

‘A distinguished journalist and a pioneer of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, Pat is also a respected Australian historian, especially in the fields of gender and media history.’

— ADB MEDAL CITATION

Other initiatives of the National Centre of Biography have benefitted from Pat’s support. Notably, she has been a keen contributor to the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, in which she has published two articles. Beyond the *ADB*, she has also held various executive positions on cultural and community organisations in the ACT, including the Canberra & District Historical Society (1987–2004, 2013), *Canberra Historical Journal* (1987–2000), Manning Clark House committee (early 2000s), Friends of the National Library of Australia (1997–99, deputy chair 1998), National Folk Fellowship selection committee (chair 2003–17), and National Foundation of Australia’s Women’s Archive project.

As well as being a prolific author and community activist, Pat has served on the *ADB*’s Commonwealth Working Party since its formation in the late 1980s. She personifies the investment of time, expertise, flexibility, and capacity to see individuals both in themselves and as expressions of their contexts that has made the *ADB* such a precious national resource. The role of Working Parties requires extended, reflective, collaborative and informed judgement, with a sensitivity to diverse scales of historical assessment. Pat exemplifies these skills and qualities. Over nearly four decades she has ensured the *ADB* has observed the highest standards in its inclusiveness and authority. She continues to be a quiet and humble champion of Australian biography and the *ADB* and is a worthy addition to the select group of *ADB* Medal recipients.’



Malcolm Allbrook presenting the medal to Pat. Photo: Michelle Staff.

Thank you Dr J. J. Carmody

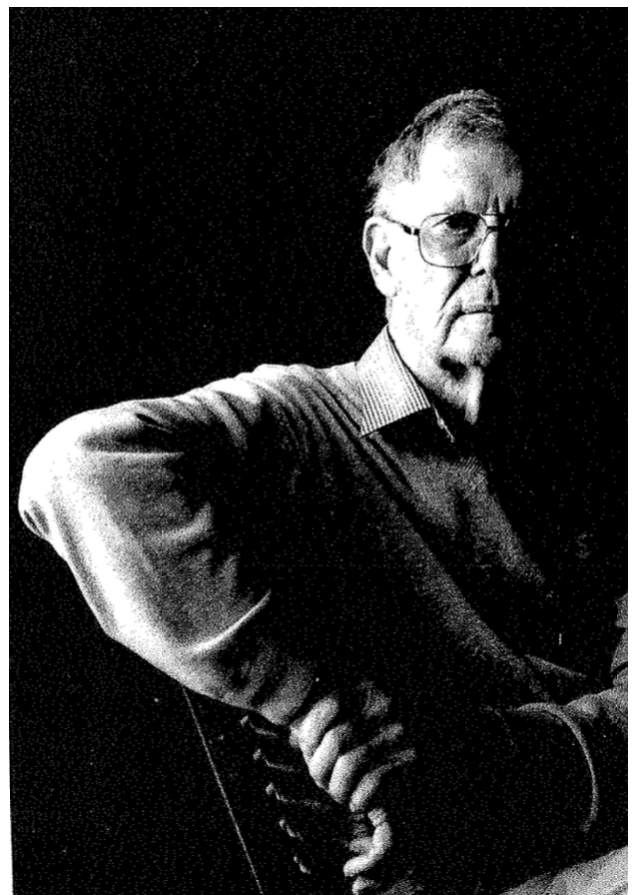
Bridget Griffen-Foley

After nearly 40 years on the NSW Working Party, and contributing some thirty entries, Dr J. J. Carmody has retired from the Working Party. 'Jack', as he is known, is a medical graduate of the University of Queensland, where he edited the student paper *Semper Floreat* and co-edited the literary magazine *Galmahra*. From 1965 he taught and researched in physiology and pharmacology in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales, and spent four sabbaticals in Germany. On his retirement as Associate Professor in 2004, Jack took up an honorary position at the University of Sydney and taught in a unit on 'Music and Medicine' in the Master of Medical Humanities program.

He also worked for several decades as a writer and broadcaster for national and international media, principally on opera and concert music, but also as a book reviewer. Jack served as a member of the NSW Advisory Committee of the ABC in the 1970s and, more recently, as President of the Australian Catholic Historical Society.

Jack's association with the *ADB* began when he was invited to write the entry on my grandfather, James Joseph Griffen Foley, journalist, singer, and music critic, some of the research for which he conducted while on sabbatical in Ireland. That entry was published in volume 9 of the *ADB* in 1983. Jack went on to join the NSW Working Party, advising especially on medical and musical subjects. Jack's entries, published in ten volumes of the *ADB*, range across musicians (a flautist, a pianist, a conductor, composers, and singers); critics, journalists, and broadcasters; scientists (medical practitioners, surgeons, and academics); and the odd Catholic bishop (Thomas Muldoon). His most recent entry, on Professor John Shaw, was published online in 2024, and will appear in print in Volume 20.

'He writes... that his association with the *ADB* has been one of the greatest "pleasures and privileges" of his academic life.'



Jack Carmody. Photo provided by his family.

Jack maintains, modestly, that his colleagues on the NSW Working Party taught him 'how to be an historian'. He writes — and I have also heard him say it more than once — that his association with the *ADB* has been one of the greatest 'pleasures and privileges' of his academic life. The Working Party is immensely grateful for his decades of service, and (partly because he is married to my cousin) I look forward to continuing to draw informally on Jack's expertise and counsel.

Remembering Nan Phillips

Emily Gallagher

A new name plate graced the corridors of the RSSS Building at the ANU with the official naming of the **Nan Phillips Library** in February this year. It was the first room to be officially named in the building.

Since its earliest days, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has maintained its own collection of reference texts and resources, from local histories to encyclopedias, genealogical handbooks to medical directories. Over time, the collection has come to occupy its own room and until recently was known simply as the *ADB* Library.

It was felt that renaming the library was one of the ways we might better recognise the significant but under recognised contributions that many women have made to the *ADB* since its inception in the 1960s. There were women on staff from the Dictionary's earliest days, and in 1971 five out of eight *ADB* staff members were women (see the front cover of this newsletter). These were often highly qualified and skilled researchers who were doing specialist work as well as supervising students and publishing. Though many 'were eventually promoted from research assistants to research officers they remained classified as general staff in an "odd academic cul-de-sac"; as Mark McGinness explained. 'It is relevant,' noted Darryl Bennet in *The ADB's Story*, 'that the *ADB* had relied on the labours of people — mainly women — few of whom had the prospect of further promotion.' The renaming of the *ADB* Library is intended to go some way towards recognising the long and dedicated service of at least one of these women.

Who was Nan Phillips?

Nancy Wearne was born on 9 October 1911 at Drummoyne, Sydney, eldest of three children of New South Wales-born parents Reginald James Wearne, stock and station agent, and his wife Nellie Mildred, née Hunt. Nan was educated at Parramatta High School and began her career with Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd as a mechanical tracer and records clerk. She was later personal assistant to the chief engineer. In July 1934 she married Richard 'Keith' Phillips, a Fiji-born electrical engineer and later RAAF wing commander. They would have three children. During World War II, Nan managed a guesthouse and worked at the Department of Munitions before undertaking various research jobs; at one stage she was apparently appointed as an honorary audiometrist at two Sydney hospitals.

Phillips joined the ANU History Department in 1961 as a departmental assistant. She initially divided her time between Dr Donald Anthony Low and Professor Douglas Pike, with whom she helped establish the infant *Australian Dictionary of Biography* project in the old Canberra Hospital building on Liversidge Street. She moved into the *ADB* full-time towards the middle of 1963 and worked as an administrator and research assistant under the first three general editors. Though she officially retired in 1979, she remained on staff in a part-time capacity as a consultant until October 1980, when the University refused to continue employing her over the retirement age.

The *ADB* was a lifelong vocation for Phillips, and one to which she was 'painstakingly devoted', in the words of Sally O'Neill, who described Nan as 'for many years the gatekeeper to the General Editor's Office.' She helped oversee the production of the first seven volumes and has been credited as the organising force behind the *ADB*'s formidable early reference and filing system and the author of its first style manual.



Nan Phillips. Photo: Canberra District and Historical Society.

Beyond her administrative and research work, she also represented the *ADB* at conferences, published articles in journals, undertook a wide range of supervisory tasks, and wrote twelve *ADB* entries. The *ADB*'s third general editor, Dr Geoffrey Serle, considered her not only the 'chief executive officer of the enterprise but its heart and soul.' Her tireless enthusiasm as well as her serene, loyal and kind demeanour were 'a constant and cohesive force in the day-to-day office life of the *ADB*'. She 'became bibliographer (a most important and difficult task), marker-up of copy, manager of the style manual, and a hundred and one other things'. In Serle's opinion, she was 'quite a remarkable person.' Phillips was also a member of the ANU General Staff Association and coached the University's women's hockey team for several years.

One *Canberra Times* article in 1971 even recognised Phillips as a 'natural spokeswoman' for the *ADB*: 'She is a personable and efficient woman [...] "I'm a non-graduate with a lot of experience which has proved useful", she said this week, condensing her background quickly in order to list the qualifications of her co-workers.' According to her colleagues Sue Edgar and Martha Campbell, it was with 'patience and persistent care in compiling bibliographies [that] she developed a masterly system of abbreviations and thereby helped to build the Dictionary's high reputation for accuracy.'

In 1981 Phillips was awarded a Master of Arts *honoris causa* from the ANU, which she cherished as she had not had the chance to pursue higher education. Professor Ken Inglis wrote in the citation that 'apart from the editors [...] nobody has contributed so richly to the achievement of the dictionary as Nan Phillips; and the editors know better than anybody else how indispensable she has been to them.'



Bede Nairn, Nan Phillips & Geoffrey Serle in the *ADB* Library. Photo: ANU Archives.

Forty years after her death, Phillips's name can still be found on the inside covers of many of the books in the library that is now named after her. 'She had a formidable library at her house,' remembered Dr Chris Cunneen, and 'as far as the *ADB*'s Library is concerned, Nan was the founder.' 'Among her notable contributions,' wrote Edgar and Campbell in 1984, 'was the library she helped build up for the Dictionary by her personal and avid collecting.' On Phillips's death, her husband donated 830 books (estimated to be worth more than \$4,000) in memory of his wife. Her son Robert Phillips and grandson Steve Allan donated several more upon learning of the Nan Phillips Library this year.

Phillips was also heavily involved with the Canberra and District Historical Society, where she served as honorary secretary and publications officer, and in her memory they established the biennial Nan Phillips Memorial Lecture (1985–2003). She was a member of the Royal Australian Historical Society (1964–84) and honorary secretary of the Federation of Historical Societies (1977–83).

In recent years the *ADB* has prided itself on its inclusion of both significant and representative lives. The ambition to bring to light the stories and contributions of everyday Australians, especially those who worked tirelessly for

others and the nation without any desire for personal gain or recognition, remains. In remembering Phillips, we also pay tribute to all the other professional staff who have kept the *ADB* running since 1961. We hope that this decision will go some way towards recognising the important role that professional staff, particularly administrators, have played (and continue to play) in the *ADB* and NCB.

First Nations Biography Australia

Shauna Bostock

In 2017 an application to the Australian Research Council's (ARC) Discovery Indigenous scheme by Associate Professor Shino Konishi, Dr Malcolm Allbrook, and Emeritus Professor Tom Griffiths was successful, and the *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography (IADB)* project was established. The project's primary goal was to address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* and to consider Indigenous biography more generally. Formally ended in December 2024, the *IADB* project has produced an edited collection, *Reframing Indigenous Lives* (Routledge, 2024), and a special stand-alone volume of over 100 new Indigenous entries, which will be published in 2026. Synchronously, the end of the *IADB* project coincided with the beginning of the *First Nations Biography Australia (FNBA)* project.

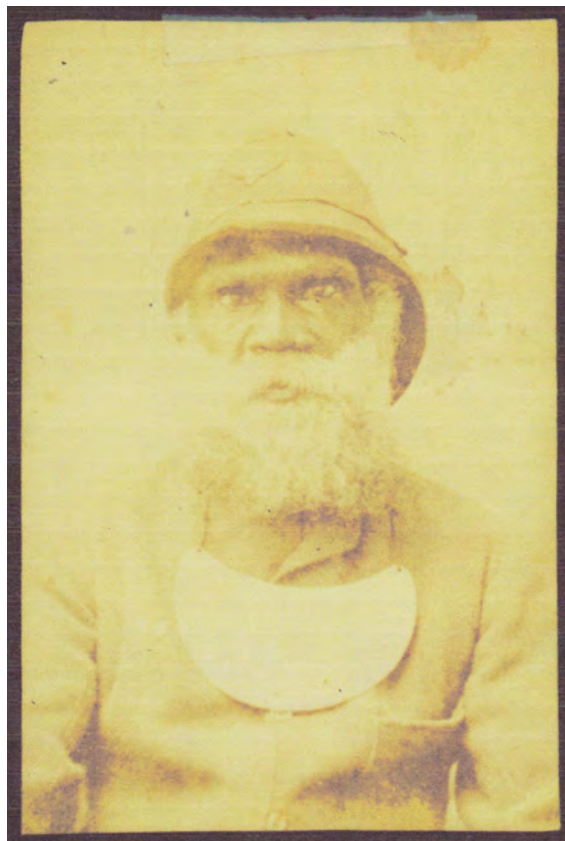
The *FNBA* project (2024–2029) is a five-year endeavour that aims to expand on the work of the *IADB* by contributing 300 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biographies to the *ADB*. Similar to the *IADB*, the *FNBA* project places the First Nations Working Party (FNWP, formerly the Indigenous Working Party), a group of Indigenous scholars from across Australia, as the key advisory body. The FNWP is also supported by *ADB* state-based working party volunteers. The *FNBA* project contributes to the *ADB* in three main ways:

- Firstly, it is consolidating the work of the *IADB* project — that is, it continues to add new First Nations biographies, written primarily by First Nations people or in collaboration with First Nations families and communities, into the *ADB*.
- Secondly, it is identifying existing *ADB* entries about Indigenous Australians that need to be revised, both in response to new sources of information and/or sensitivities surrounding Indigenous representation.
- Thirdly, it is initiating 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, thereby enabling wide engagement across all age groups and abilities.

The *FNBA* project continues the important work of introducing readers to remarkable, but often little-known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lives shed light on different, sometimes hidden, chapters in Australia's past. The recommendations of people for *ADB* biographies are called 'nominations' and, not surprisingly, finding nominations is one thing, but securing author commissions is an ongoing challenge. Nonetheless, the *FNBA* team consider nominations as the starting point that creates the first step forward in our 'nomination-to-publication' process.

The idea to research the two huge volumes of David Horton's *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture* (1994) yielded an astonishing number of 80 new nominations for the *FNBA* project. These nominations were approved by the working party in May, and the *FNBA* has since accumulated a second list of 75 nominations, making a total of 155 new nominations. The fact that the *FNBA* project, in the second of its five years, has just passed the halfway mark to its target number of nominations is mightily encouraging. This lays a solid foundation for future success, but the project's team are very conscious that there is still a long way to go.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biographies we have commissioned so far constitute a multi-generational



An entry on Wollumbin Johnnie will be one of the articles produced by the *FNBA* project. Photo by Joshua Bray (1838-1918), published with permission from the Bray family descendants.

collection of lifespans that spread across the chronological timeline of national history. The *FNBA* project's earliest subject is Wollumbin Johnnie (c.1830s–c.1890s), a respected Bundjalung elder whom the Wollumbin/Mt Warning people chose as their leader to negotiate with white settlers. The most recent *FNBA* subject is Rosalie Kunoth-Monks OA, (1937–2022) an Aboriginal film star who later became a social justice and human rights activist.

The *FNBA* team is led by Associate Professor Steve Kinnane as chair, and he, along with the *FNBA* administrator Dr Shauna Bostock and the dedicated working party of Indigenous scholars across Australia, are highly confident they will achieve the goal of contributing 300 new biographies to the *ADB* by 2029.

It is by virtue of the generous financial support of the J. T. Reid Charitable Trusts, which have provided \$774,000 over five years, that the *FNBA* project is able to continue this essential work. The *FNBA* entries are written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, and we wholeheartedly invite both nominations of likely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects to be included in the *ADB* and recommendations of potential authors for these important entries.

The nomination form can be accessed via the [FNBA page](#) on the National Centre of Biography's website.



The Bostock Brothers: Gerry, George & Lindsay. Shauna Bostock is writing an entry about her uncle Gerry for the *FNBA* project. Published with the permission of George Bostock.

50 years of nation-making: a revitalised PNG Dictionary of Biography

Nicholas Hoare, Theresa Meki & Keimelo Gima

Fifty Years of Nation-Making: A Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography, Volume One was launched at the University of Papua New Guinea, University of Goroka, and Divine Word University during Papua New Guinea's golden jubilee celebrations in September. Here, in a post originally published by [Devpolicy Blog](#), the editorial team reflect on their achievement.

With the golden jubilee celebrations having just passed, Papua New Guinea is equal parts festive and reflective. The national broadcasters have played their part in fostering the latter: screening history-themed documentaries and news segments in between the comprehensive live coverage of official events across the nation's capital. Universities and training centres such as the Somare Institute of Leadership and Governance organised symposia, seminars and public lectures on PNG's past, present and future.

Nation-building has been at the heart of it all. And before the party atmosphere took over Sir John Guise Stadium on the night of 16 September, the centrepiece of the official program was a parade of historical portraits celebrating Papua New Guinean nation builders from the past 50 years. There were prime ministers, constitutional planners, public servants and cultural icons such as the designer of the PNG flag, Susan Karike, and composer of *O Arise, All You Sons*, Thomas Shacklady. With many of the portraits being carried to the stage by descendants, it was a powerful and emotional program that showcased PNG's rich and varied history.

Our new edited collection, *Fifty Years of Nation-Making: A Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography, Volume One*, published by the Australian National University's Department of Pacific Affairs, seeks to do something similar. Inspired by anthropologist Robert J. Foster's use of nation-making — encompassing grassroots, informal, ongoing and contingent forms of community organisation — ahead of nation-building with its formal, state-centric connotations, the volume celebrates the lives and careers of an eclectic range of Papua New Guinean personalities, many of whom are still with us today and in the twilight of their careers.

By sidestepping prime ministers in Volume One, the biographical entries speak strongly to popular misgivings about the state of leadership in the country and its many challenges such as rural and urban development, decentralisation, peacebuilding, public service reform and education. As a book of reference, it settles a longstanding debate about who was the first Papua New Guinean to be awarded a PhD (the answer is biologist and medical doctor David Linge; John Waiko was the first graduate in the social sciences). But as this is a uniquely *Papua New Guinean* Dictionary of Biography, attentive to disciplinary calls for critical reflexivity, each biographer is introduced through a positionality statement, making it clear that these biographies are only portraits in time and not definitive accounts.



Divine Word University student & Dame Meg Taylor biographer Jonathan Siba signing copies of Volume One for his fans. Photo: Nicholas Hoare.

Much like nation-making itself, researching, writing and editing these biographies is an ongoing process open to contestation and competing approaches. The current project, led by the three of us, is the rejuvenation of an earlier University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) project. While Volume One was launched at UPNG on 11 September, there is no reason why subsequent volumes cannot have significant input from universities and research institutes from around the nation, focusing on themes, sectors or geographies of particular interest. Indeed, Volume One includes authors from UPNG, the University of Goroka and Divine Word University, as well as Papua New Guinean academics, students from overseas universities and people outside of academia altogether. Volume Two is planned to coincide with next year's Pacific History Association conference hosted by UPNG.



Volume One's youngest author, undergraduate student Jonathan Siba with Divine Word University's Friendship Library & Noser Archives staff. Photo: Nicholas Hoare.

One of the strengths of this volume is its range of perspectives. Many of the biographies have been written by descendants such as Dame Kila Amini's (by her son and daughter) and Kuri Dom's (by granddaughter Illeana Dom). Many of the others have been written by friends and colleagues. There are a few Australian contributors and musician David Bridie's tribute to his long-time friend and artistic collaborator 'Sir' George Telek stands out. Telek is a perfect example of someone taking PNG to the world and Bridie speaks from close experience about musical legends David Byrne and Peter Gabriel being floored by Telek's music in the 1990s.

As editors, we argue that collective biography is an ideal vehicle for the telling of modern Papua New Guinean history, especially given the often-cited complexity and diversity of this nation. The extra layer of engaged and relational writing is a long way from the old-fashioned standards of distance and objectivity that mark much older dictionaries of national biography in other parts of the world. There is further scope for experimentation in form and style — once again drawing on the rich history of Papua New Guinean writing and innovative work by Indigenous Pacific scholars working with the Oceania Working Party of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. But the goal remains to make this a readable book of reference aimed predominantly at university and high school students.

To finish with an anecdote, the importance of this relational approach was underscored at our UPNG launch when Grace Dom, daughter of the late Kuri Dom after whom the UPNG Humanities and Social Sciences building is named, spoke to the audience about the various emotions this process has evoked for her. Kuri, a UPNG social scientist and social worker, tragically passed away while completing his PhD in London. And, to paraphrase Grace's words, she was struck by two things. First, by looking at the other entries in this volume — mostly of Papua New Guineans from her father's generation — it reminded her of what her father could have become if he did not die at such a young age. Second, for her daughter, Illeana — who never got to meet her grandfather — undertaking research about Kuri was a way for her to remain connected to her family and PNG culture despite having become a global citizen, undertaking higher education in Japan.

We doubt that Grace's two observations are unique to the Dom family and if this project can continue to offer these kinds of opportunities for the next generation of Papua New Guinean citizens to learn from the past, it will have served its purpose.

Disclosure: Funding for the Revitalising the PNG Dictionary of Biography project is provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Pacific Research Program.

Collaboration with AustLit

Michelle Staff with Maggie Nolan

What do we mean by ‘cultural heritage’ when it applies to an individual or group of people? Why do we index it in the *ADB*? And what do we need to consider when assigning a particular ‘cultural heritage’ to one of our subjects?

These are the sorts of questions that have sparked a collaboration between the *ADB* and AustLit, another major national digital humanities project in Australia. Based at the University of Queensland, AustLit works to fulfil its mission to be the definitive bibliography and research environment for Australian literature and storytelling. Like the *ADB*, agent records in AustLit (for example, pages about authors or particular texts) have an optional field for indexing called ‘heritage’. However, when director Maggie Nolan searched the AustLit database for her project on Australian writers of Irish descent, she found that at that time only 8% of their agent records were attributed with a specific heritage. While the *ADB* has a much higher utilisation of this category – around 68% – there are still some major blind spots in how we approach the issue. Moreover, there are several conceptual and ethical questions that both databases share. We feel that the time is ripe to reconsider and address these issues.

Maggie and I presented a paper on this project at the Digital Humanities Australasia conference in December this year. We focused mainly on the ‘cultural heritage’ category to lay out our ambitions and ultimate goals. We discussed how category work is not ethically neutral, framing it as both a normative and material practice. And we emphasised our shared belief in principles of findability and diversity in digital humanities databases like ours. As we flagged in the presentation, in due course we intend to expand this project to rethink how we represent and index gender in the *ADB* and AustLit as well. In this we are ably supported and guided by experts with academic and/or lived experience, notably two members of the *ADB* community: Professor Noah Riseman and Dr Yves Rees. Finally we will also consider how we index religious influence and how it relates to other categories.

This AustLit-*ADB* collaborative project has a clear goal: to develop a matrix or set of guidelines for indexing cultural heritage, as well as gender and religious influence, that both our databases will adopt in a consistent manner (and, we hope, that other databases in Australia will also adopt). What we are now doing is the intellectual work of thinking through various considerations that will shape the final best practice model.

By developing a matrix of best practice for handling metadata relating to cultural heritage, gender, and religious influence, we will not only enable future research projects across the full gamut of ‘Australian’ experience, but also contribute to reshaping the norms and assumptions that frame how we tell people’s stories today. We look forward to continuing this work in the new year.



Maggie Nolan and Michelle Staff at the Digital Humanities Australasia conference, December 2025. Photo: Tully Barnett.

ADB entries published in 2025

We asked the ADB's research editors to pick their favourite entries from this year.

'Narrowly edging out two other contenders, my favourite article this year is Alison Ransome's [Verlie Just](#), creative jewellery maker and art gallery owner-director. It is the epitome of the good ADB article: deeply researched and elegantly written by an author knowledgeable about the subject and her occupation. A colourful and complex human being and a slice of Australian art history emerge seamlessly from the text.' — **Darryl Bennet**

'It's tempting to go for someone relatively unknown who the ADB will rescue from obscurity. But my favourite for the year was [Geoffrey Dutton](#) (1922–1998), a self-confessed OAF (being descended from an 'Old Adelaide Family'), a precocious and talented RAAF pilot during World War II, who went on to devote his life to Australian writing and culture. Dutton struggled to reconcile his privileged background with his more liberal views. In 1966 he gladly accepted an invitation from the Adelaide Club's executive to resign his membership in view of his pronouncements in favour of an Australian republic. As his compelling life story *Out in the Open: An Autobiography* (UQP, 1994) reveals, he was connected with virtually every creative Australian of note from the mid-1950s until his death. It was a pleasure to work with the author of this piece, Western Australian poet and academic Dennis Haskell, who had collaborated with Dutton to publish a volume Kenneth Slessor's poetry.' — **Peter Woodley**

'Eighty-eight years ago, six-year-old [Joy King](#) sung what would become one of the best-known renditions of the 'Aeroplane Jelly Song' with the Radio 2SM Orchestra. In late 1937 the Shirley Temple look-alike from Sydney had won a State-wide competition to sing the jingle for the popular confectionary product. For her efforts, she won about ten guineas, a lifetime supply of Aeroplane Jelly, and a place in Australian cultural memory. Over the next fifty years, as Joy 'grew up', married and raised a family in Brisbane, she remained the voice of Aeroplane Jelly. Now, thanks to Bill Casey, we know a little more about the story behind the voice. This is one of the most memorable entries for me this year — it surprises and delights and is a good example of how children make history.' — **Emily Gallagher**

'I have enjoyed editing most of the ADB entries assigned to me this year and it is hard to pick a favourite. The most colourful entry I edited was certainly that of [Beth Thwaites](#), a social journalist ("gossip columnist"?) with the *Truth* newspaper in Melbourne from 1933 to 1949. As a schoolgirl Beth discovered a talent for entertaining her fellow students. She studied history and philosophy at the University of Melbourne, where she was prominent in the dramatic society and student revues; a contemporary later recalled that "her Rabelaisian roaring could be heard wherever men and women met together."

Thwaites aspired to a career in journalism but was rejected by Melbourne's major newspapers. She eventually secured a job at the *Truth*, where she wrote social news, theatre criticism, and answers to readers' questions. As the biography's author Paul de Serville observes, however, "it was as a beady-eyed, sharp-tongued chronicler of Melbourne's 'champagne set' that she became famous — dreaded by some and quoted with amusement by others."





Paul de Serville, who has written thirteen *ADB* entries and has focused on social relations among the elite in his historical research, was a good choice as author for this entry. Perhaps his most interesting observation is that Thwaites was innately conservative: “During her career she rarely criticised old Melbourne society; it was the thrusting, ostentatious newcomers who were her prey.” — **Sam Furphy**

‘I always enjoy editing the various *ADB* entries that cross my desk each year — getting to explore such a variety of lives and experiences is definitely a perk of being an *ADB* research editor! As co-chair (with Professor Melanie Oppenheimer) of the Women’s Working Party, I have been particularly excited to see some fascinating accounts of women’s lives coming in to the *ADB* offices. For example, this year I edited Joshua Carter’s fascinating article on [Florence Mary Thurles Thomas](#) (1908–1997). Known as Thurles, Thomas attended Abbotsleigh Church of England School for Girls and the University of Sydney, where she was one of relatively few women studying law, and also gained a Blue for cricket. Having been admitted as a solicitor in New South Wales in 1933, she found it difficult to obtain work in the law, and returned to Abbotsleigh as a form mistress and then the school’s librarian. After serving in the Australian Women’s Army Service during World War II, Thomas went back to librarianship, as well as spending some time working in the book trade. She was able to use her legal training in her work at the University of Sydney’s law school library, and later at Macquarie University, where she developed the law library’s collection, as well as in helping to draft the royal charter and by-laws of the Library Association of Australia. Abbotsleigh’s archives were named in Thomas’s honour.’ — **Karen Fox**



‘Sir [Alexander George William Keys](#) (1923–2000), army officer and president of the Returned Services League of Australia. Keys’s parents instilled in him a commitment to community service, leading to his interest in the RSL. Despite an already impressive World War II record, he felt obliged to volunteer for the Australian commitment to the war in Korea. In September 1978 Keys was elected RSL national president, and advocated human rights, refugees, Asian immigration, and multiculturalism. He once contested the New South Wales Legislative Assembly seat of Monaro as a Liberal Party candidate, but later developed a working relationship with the ALP government of Bob Hawke. Acknowledged as an astute political negotiator, he was magnanimous towards critics of his efforts to modernise the RSL.’ — **Stephen Wilks**

All the above entries are available to read [online](#) now, and will appear in Volume 20 of the *ADB*. We look forward to seeing which subjects are added to our editors’ queues next year.



Images pages 14–15, from top: Verlie Just, by John Rigby, 1996, © Estate of John Thomas Rigby; Geoffrey Dutton, c.1951, National Library of Australia; Joy King (later Wigglesworth), 1937, courtesy of Wigglesworth family; Beth Thwaites, 1952, by Gordon F. De Lisle, State Library of New South Wales; Lieut. Thurles Thomas, 1942, Thurles Thomas Archives, Abbotsleigh; Captain Alexander George William (‘Bill’) Keys, c.1946, Australian War Memorial.

NCB staff & student news



Julie Rickwood, Nicholas Brown, Malcolm Allbrook, Tom Griffiths & Maria Nugent at Malcolm's retirement event, July 2025.
Photo: Michelle Staff.

During a challenging year the team at the ANU have been up to all kinds of interesting things.

Staff movements & visitors

There have been some changes to the NCB team this year. In July the ADB's Managing Editor, Dr Malcolm Allbrook, retired after over a decade in the role. He remains connected to the ADB through the WA Working Party, and to the NCB as a centre visitor. We reflect more on Malcolm's career at the ANU on page 18.

Many readers will know that Dr Rani Kerin has filled a number of roles with the ADB over the years, including most recently as non-resident research editor on our IADB and FNBA projects. In November Rani took on the part-time position of Managing Editor for the *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* (BIES), part of the ANU Indonesia Project, based in the Arndt-Corden Department of Economics, Crawford School of Public Policy at the ANU. She will continue with us as a copyeditor. We wish her all the best in her new role!

Each year the NCB also hosts several external visitors. Among them are Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna, who is a member of the ADB Editorial Board. We congratulate Mark on the recent publication of his latest book, *The Shortest History of Australia* (Black Inc., 2025). Dr Gabriella Kelly-Davies joined the NCB as a visitor this year as well. Gabriella hosts the podcast *Biographers in Conversation*, which has released many interviews with life writers. You can access these via the [podcast website](#).

Successes

NCB staff have once again had a fantastic year when it comes to recognition of their work and talent.

In March **Dr Michelle Staff** was awarded the Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship for 2025 to help further her joint biography of Australian feminists and sisters Bessie Rischbieth and Olive Evans. One of the judges, Professor Clare Wright, commented: 'Michelle's project thrilled us, creatively and conceptually, as it seeks to resurrect the historical importance of Bessie Rischbieth, a woman who dedicated her life's energy and resources to ensuring that women's political activism was not lost to history. But more than that, investigating the lives of the two sisters — Bessie and Olive, one a childless widow, one a mother of six — promises a nuanced reading of both the random and systemic forces that have shaped women's lives.' Supported by the fellowship, Michelle completed archival research overseas in September and is planning to head to Perth in January to use material at the State Library of Western Australia and elsewhere.



Michelle receiving the award from Della Rowley at Adelaide Writers Week. Photo: Angela Woollacott/Carroll Pursell.

Another NCB team member, **Dr Emily Gallagher**, was recognised multiple times this year for her outstanding work. Also in March she was announced as the winner of the Lyndall Ryan Thesis Prize, presented by the International Australian Studies Association (InASA), for her already award-winning PhD thesis 'The Childhood Imagination in Australia, 1890–1940' (2023). The judges recognised the creativity of Emily's research, noting that hers 'is a fascinating, excellent and innovative thesis — both conceptually and methodologically'. In addition, Emily was the recipient of a Publishing Subsidy from the Australian Academy of the Humanities, which assisted with the publication of a book based on her thesis, and was awarded the Minoru Hokari Memorial Scholarship, which allowed her to travel to Western Arranta Country (see pages 24–25 for more on this trip). We were delighted to see *Playtime: A History of Australian Childhood* (La Trobe) published in September this year, already to rave reviews — and a Canberra Critics Circle non-fiction prize. Congratulations, Emily!



Playtime front cover. Photo: La Trobe University Press.

The NCB was delighted to learn that Indigenous research editor **Dr Shauna Bostock** was successful in securing a highly sought-after ABC TOP 5 residency this year. Shauna was one of five humanities researchers selected for the program, run by ABC Radio, and spent two weeks (16–29 September) learning from leading journalists and producers about communicating with the media and their audiences. Her project, 'Multi-generational narrative history of the lived experience of Aboriginal people from colonisation to the present', extends the work of her award-winning monograph, *Reaching Through Time: Finding my family's stories* (Allen & Unwin, 2023). On why this residency was an important opportunity for her, Shauna said: 'Writing a book can only go so far, and I am hoping that this residency is the first stepping-stone on a pathway that leads to me to creating my own documentary film. I am eager to learn all the media skills necessary to share my research with a much wider audience.' See page 28 for more on Shauna's residency.

Finally, congratulations to PhD student **Matthew Cunneen**, who has been recognised for his teaching excellence. Matt received a Teaching Merit Certificate from the University of Tasmania for his work tutoring the course 'Convict Ancestors' in 2024.

‘Malcolmfest’

Melanie Nolan

We met to celebrate Dr Malcolm Allbrook’s contributions to the *ADB* by way of a ‘Malcolmfest’ on 10 July.

Malcolm joined the School of History at the ANU in 2010 as a Research Associate and Project Manager on Professor Ann McGrath’s ARC Discovery Project ‘Australia’s Ancient and Modern Pasts: A History of Lake Mungo’ (2011–2014). This was embedded in the Australian Centre for Indigenous History’s (ACIH) broader project ‘Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place’. One of Malcolm’s roles was to co-convene the symposium ‘Deep Time and Deep Histories: A Transdisciplinary Collaboration’ in June 2013. Just as he was finishing his contract, the *ADB*’s Managing Editor position became vacant. Malcolm took up this role in 2014, serving in it until his retirement on 4 July 2025.

The job was, and is, a non-standard academic position. It requires cobbling and mending other people’s work. The *ADB* is like Adam Smith’s pin factory with eighteen points at which someone reads the article and so is an intensely collaborative project. The Managing Editor is at the centre of this biography hub.

It is also an academic position, with the holder pursuing their own independent research agenda. Malcolm had biographical interests, especially family history work, launching his monograph *Henry Prinsep’s Empire: Framing a Distant Colony* with ANU Press in 2014 soon after joining the *ADB*. He went on to publish *Carlotta’s Perth: Memories of a Colonial Childhood* (City of Perth, 2017) with Mary Anne Jebb. He co-organised the conference ‘Related Histories: Studying the Family’, which was held in 2018 at the National Library of Australia. Subsequently, with Sophie Scott-Brown, he co-edited a collection called *Family History and Historians in Australia and New Zealand: Related Histories* (Routledge, 2021), which they launched at the 2022 ANU conference ‘Family History: The Next Generation’. Malcolm’s biographical span widened as the inaugural editor of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* in 2018.



Malcolm was gifted a shield carved by John Darraga Watson, Senior Kimberley Elder. Photo: Michelle Staff.

During his time with the *ADB* Malcolm also led our initiatives in Indigenous biography. The *ADB*’s record in this area has been woeful in the past. Malcolm had written Indigenous community histories, collaborating with prominent Kimberley Aboriginal Elder John Darraga Watson to produce *Never Stand Still: Life, Land and Politics in the Kimberley*; was part of a team that curated ‘Burlganya Wanggaya’, an exhibition of Aboriginal history and culture in Carnarvon, Western Australia, which was awarded the MAGNA award for best permanent exhibition in 2012; and co-authored a collaborative community history of the Worrorra people of the Dambimangari native title lands: *Barddabardda Wodjenangordee: The Creation, History and People of Dambeemahgaddee Country* (Fremantle Press, 2017). Malcolm had also developed an interest in landscape biography during his time in ACIH, writing articles on ‘Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes’, and an *ADB* article on Mungo Woman and Mungo Man, who lived around 42,000 years ago, in 2019. He was a member of the *ADB*’s Indigenous Working Party, which was established in 2015, and together with Shino Konishi and Tom Griffiths, a Chief Investigator on the ARC-funded *Indigenous Dictionary of Biography* project (2017–2024). Among its outputs, the CIs edited *Reframing Indigenous Lives* (2025), and ANU Press is publishing a collection of 110 *IADB* entries next year.

A range of speakers talked to various aspects of Malcolm’s work. Sophie Scott-Brown (St Andrews) zoomed in from the UK to discuss working with Malcolm on his family history interests. Steve Kinnane (Marda Marda from Mirriwoong Country in the East Kimberley) surveyed Malcolm’s community life writing interests. Tom Griffiths (South of the Murray) spoke to the *IADB* project, and Shauna Bostock (Bundjalung) placed the *ADB*’s writing of Indigenous lives in a wider context. Kim Sterelny (down from the 6th floor, School of Philosophy) discussed the potentialities of Malcolm’s post-*ADB* project, a landscape biography of the Pilbara. Symposium members enjoyed drinks and a meal, toasting Malcolm into his retirement.

40 years at the ANU for Karen Ciuffetelli

On 25 November the ADB/NCB's long-serving administrator, Karen Ciuffetelli, celebrated 40 years at the ANU. To mark the occasion, colleagues past and present have shared their reflections on Karen's contributions to the ADB.

'Forty years in a job is a fine achievement ... Throughout, you have filled your role unobtrusively and efficiently, and with modesty, patience, and humour. But we the staff have very much appreciated all you have done and continue to do. Speaking as one who worked closely with you over my years as managing editor, I want to record my personal thanks and appreciation for your efforts over the years. I speak for all who have worked with you — your support has made our jobs easier. All the best Karen, and thanks for everything.' — **Dr Malcolm Allbrook, ADB Managing Editor 2014–2025**

'For me, Karen Ciuffetelli has quite simply always been there. I joined ANU a decade or so after Karen and can't imagine it without her. I was then a postdoctoral fellow in History, but happily I was accommodated in the ADB corridor and soon joined the team as a member of the Editorial Board. Karen kindly answered my questions and guided me thoughtfully, as she has done ever since. For our widespread team of voluntary scholars across the nation, Karen is the key contact person, the friendly facilitator at the heart of the enterprise. Thank you, Karen, for your warmth, camaraderie and quiet proficiency, and for your impressive and enduring commitment to the work of the ADB.' — **Em. Prof. Tom Griffiths, ADB Editorial Board Chair**

'Congratulations to Karen on forty years' service to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. I well remember the day I appointed her from the Research School's typing pool to the ADB staff. Forty years ago, before we all had computers, clerical work was very different to what it is today. Karen joined a small staff of typists and clerks who transformed hand-written work to typescript. In the last forty years she has become an essential part of the ADB head office team, working with quiet efficiency, a smiling face and a welcoming smile. Thank you Karen for your help to me and to many other ADBers and for your friendship.' — **Dr Chris Cunneen, ADB Deputy General Editor 1982–1996**



ADB staff in 1999; Karen is in the front row, second from the left. Photo: ADB Archives.

'Karen has been a wonderful colleague and friend for the thirty-seven years I have had the pleasure of working with her. As a professional administrator, she is immensely capable and efficient, enabling her to handle a vast volume of work. As a colleague, she is invariably helpful, considerate, thoughtful, and companionable. ... Throughout her career, her contribution to making the NCB/ADB a productive and congenial workplace has been immeasurable. I warmly congratulate her on reaching forty years of outstanding service.' — **Darryl Bennet, ADB Deputy General Editor 2001–2008**

'I first encountered Karen while a PhD student in the then History department at the Research School of Social Sciences, but only really got to know her when I joined the ADB staff as a research assistant. By then Karen had already spent more than a decade at the ANU. Over the years I have appreciated Karen's quiet dedication to the role of administering the lengthy, and often unwieldy, processes that help to deliver an ADB entry into print. Her patience in dealing with authors who repeatedly ask for an extension (a sin I have been guilty of) knows no bounds. But I do have to mention Karen's special skill ... avoiding appearing in ADB photographs. While I'm sure one or two have been mustered to mark this occasion, more notable — given her years of service — is how many she has managed to avoid. Karen always had an uncanny knack of finding an urgent task that needed attention at the crucial moment. Her absence from these images, however, belies her centrality to the continued smooth running of the ADB.' — **Dr Nicole McLennan, former ADB research editor**

Teaching: HIST8011

Karen Fox

In 2025 NCB staff once again shared the teaching of HIST8011 Biography and History, a graduate course in the School of History. Taught in Semester One in 2025, the course was convened this year by Dr Karen Fox, with contributions from fellow NCB/ADB staff members as well as from Emeritus Professor Mark McKenna, an NCB visitor and member of the ADB Editorial Board.

The course encourages students to think critically and creatively about the researching and writing of biography, and its relationship to the discipline of history, as well as about topics such as autobiography and memoir, ethics, Indigenous life writing, feminist biography, collective biography, and the place of the individual in history. Students learn different approaches to researching and writing biographies, develop their understanding of the uses of biography and life writing in the humanities and social sciences, and explore a range of thorny questions that biographers often encounter.

The course will run again in 2026, convened by Dr Sam Furphy.



HIST8011 lecture 1: 'It's just a biography'? Photo: Karen Fox.

HDR students

2025 has been a huge year for HDR (higher degree by research) students at the NCB. In February we celebrated **Dr James Watson's** PhD graduation. Readers of last year's *Biography Footnotes* will recall that James' thesis was a social history of asbestos in Australia. His supervisor, Professor Melanie Nolan, and Professor Frank Bongiorno both attended the celebration. James is publishing his thesis as *Fibro Dreaming* with Monash University Press next year and is working on a biography of Robert Etheridge (1846–1920), palaeontologist and museum director, for NewSouth Publishing.

There have been some changes to HDR supervision arrangements of late. **Matthew Wrigley**, who joined the ANU part-time in 2023 with the recently retired Dr Malcolm Allbrook, now has Dr Sam Furphy as primary supervisor. Matt's thesis, 'A Contact History of the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia, 1861–1896', is a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary project. In April he completed his confirmation of candidature presentation and he has twice visited the region to consult with Aboriginal community members. **Tim Adams** now is under the primary supervision of Dr Stephen Wilks, who has also joined **Nichola Garvey's** supervisory panel.

In October **Michele Horne** delivered her presubmission seminar, sharing what she has found in her research on Edward 'Weary' Dunlop over the past few years of her PhD journey. Michele expects to submit her thesis, supervised by Dr Karen Fox, in 2026.

Finally, in November **Matthew Cunneen** reached his mid-term review milestone, during which his panel reviewed his project on convict migration. Matt is making great progress on his thesis and we look forward to hearing more about it in due course.

The NCB's HDR students are producing excellent research of which we are very proud. Congratulations all!



Graduation day for Dr Watson, featuring Frank Bongiorno and Melanie Nolan. Photo: Geoffrey Watson.

The Privilege of Trailblazing workshop

Karen Fox



The workshop participants, from the ANU and beyond. Photo: Vicki Miller.

On 28 March 2025, during Women's History Month, a one-day workshop on 'The Privilege of Trailblazing' was held at the ANU, with support from the ANU Gender Institute. Organised by Dr Karen Fox, Professor Kim Rubenstein, and Dr Michelle Staff, the workshop aimed to critically investigate the concept of trailblazing.

'Trailblazing,' as a concept and a term, frequently appears in current popular and academic discourse, often as a way to describe women who are seen to have achieved something significant, and it is often implied that those women are in some way changing history.

Researchers have long been interested in women who were among the first to achieve particular milestones. Contemporary feminist praxis, especially the emphasis on intersectionality, decolonisation, and issues of privilege, require that these 'firsts' be approached in more critical ways. Bringing together historians and scholars from other disciplines, whose work ranged across Australian and Pacific histories, the event richly achieved these aims, as presenters spoke to pre-circulated draft papers on a broad spectrum of topics.

Core questions that shaped the conversation included: what enables trailblazing? Who is a trailblazer? What does trailblazing look like in colonial contexts? How and why do we remember (or forget) trailblazers? And is trailblazing a useful concept?

Many papers considered the personal and structural conditions that allowed the women of their case studies to achieve as they did, exploring issues of privilege in the process. Others prompted us to ask what we mean by 'trailblazing' — or indeed by 'privilege' — and whether and how that term helps us to understand women's achievements in breaking boundaries or expanding women's lives and experiences. A particularly interesting question that resonated throughout the day was the relationship between being 'first' and being a changemaker, and what it means to celebrate an individual as a trailblazer. These important questions continue to be relevant in the twenty-first century, when the terminology of 'trailblazing' is widely embraced.

Across four engaging sessions, around thirty contributors and participants — historians, legal scholars, curators, anthropologists, and public history professionals — considered the complex issues raised by thinking about trailblazing in several diverse contexts.

‘Who is a trailblazer? ... How and why do we remember (or forget) trailblazers? And is trailblazing a useful concept?’

These sessions centred on the following themes:

1. The Professions: Breaking Through Gendered Boundaries;
2. Women’s Work: Traditionally Feminine Realms;
3. Beyond the ‘Typical’ Trailblazer: Indigeneity, Colonialism, Migration, Class, and Religion;
4. Remember and Forgetting: Trailblazers and Their Legacies.

Among those who presented papers were NCB staff members Dr Karen Fox, who spoke about the first women parliamentarians and political candidates, and Dr Peter Woodley, who considered rural women who obtained land through the New South Wales soldier settlement scheme.

Several Women’s Working Party members also presented papers, with Professor Kim Rubenstein discussing trailblazing women lawyers; Dr Cath Bishop examining generations of trailblazing businesswomen; Dr James Keating talking on the feminist broadcaster Linda Littlejohn; Professor Melanie Oppenheimer exploring trailblazing in the Australian Red Cross; and Associate Professor Samantha Owen reflecting on the life and career of Helen Sheils, later Fenbury.

They were joined by a number of other researchers from the ANU and beyond, presenting on a wide range of topics. Rich and enlivening discussion followed all the sessions, which were expertly chaired by Gender Institute members Professor Frank Bongiorno, Dr Meaghan McEvoy, Professor Margaret Jolly, and Dr Karen Downing.

Karen, Michelle, and Kim are now hard at work on an edited collection planned to arise from the workshop. They are sincerely grateful to the ANU Gender Institute for their generous support of this event.



Left: Karen Fox welcoming participants to the workshop. Right: Margaret Jolly speaking on behalf of the Gender Institute. Photos: Michelle Staff.

Following her footsteps

Michelle Staff

The trope of the biographer retracing their subject's footsteps is a well-established one. As I discovered during my travels this spring, this is for good reason indeed.

In September I headed for London as part of my Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship. One of my main tasks was to dig into the archives at The Women's Library, LSE. Having visited the library before, I knew that there would be material by or about the Australian feminist Bessie Rischbieth in the various collections. I was not disappointed: I found evidence of the meetings and groups in which she participated during her many stays in London, as well as letters written in her own hand, which attest to her role in international feminist networks of the day. This is material I could only find by going to London just as she did.

But there was much to do outside the archives as well. Bessie visited the city many times throughout her life and resided there for the duration of World War Two. I therefore set out to discover 'Bessie's London'. This led me on a walking tour to all sorts of places across the city.

Just down the road from The Women's Library I saw Australia House, which Bessie frequented including as a member of the Boomerang Club. I saw the various unassuming terrace houses that were the headquarters of important feminist organisations in which she was involved. I walked through Green Park, where Bessie met up with fellow Australian Marjorie Chave Collisson and discussed forming a British Commonwealth League, and I saw Buckingham Palace, where she received her OBE in 1935. What was most exciting was tracking down her addresses from the 1940s, just around the corner from Harrods department store, and seeing the very steps she walked up and down every day as she went about her feminist business.

Following Bessie's footsteps took me further afield to places I never imagined visiting as well. I found myself at the Theosophical Society in Gloucester Place, in the building she visited for talks and workshops about theosophical thinking. I also ended up on a road trip to Chalice Well in Glastonbury, a spiritual retreat she visited at least twice in the 1920s. And in Athens I remembered that this was where Bessie embarked for her tour of 'the East' in 1929 — a transformative journey that challenged her views on empire and Western feminism.

More than just a fun exercise, retracing my subject's footsteps has been vital for understanding how Bessie experienced the world, for getting into her mind and imagining what she might have thought and felt as she went about her business.

The journey continues. On arriving home in Canberra I received a box of research and archival material from the late Dianne Davidson, generously shared with me by her daughter Jane. The original family photographs and interviews in these files promise to offer new insights into Bessie and her sister Olive Evans. I look forward to the next stage of my research in Perth in 2026 as I continue writing the manuscript of my joint biography 'Sisterhood: The feminist lives of Bessie Rischbieth and Olive Evans.'



At the Acropolis, Athens: Bessie Rischbieth & travelling party in 1929, Michelle in 2025. Photos: National Library of Australia & Callum Walker.

Drawing Ntaria: Arranta child artists, 1938–9

Emily Gallagher

This article was originally published on the [NCB website](#) on 30 June 2025.



Welcome to Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Photo: Emily Gallagher.

In late June I had the privilege of spending several days on Western Arranta Country in Central Australia. It was the last adventure for my book, *Playtime*, which comes out later this year with La Trobe University Press. The book is a history of Australian childhood and it takes an unusual approach in that it relies to a large extent on the writings, drawings and creative work of children themselves.

I have travelled widely over the last few years in an effort to locate child-authored materials in different parts of the country, but one of the more remarkable collections that I have come across is in fact held closer to home. The Frances Derham Collection at the National Gallery of Australia comprises around four thousand artworks that were completed by children from around the world in the mid-twentieth century. Within that immense collection are four hundred or so pencil and crayon drawings by children who were at the Finke River Lutheran Mission at Ntaria (Hermannsburg) in 1938–9. It is perhaps the most significant collection of First Nations child art in Australia from the pre-1945 period.

When I first saw these drawings at the Gallery's off-site facility six years ago, they ignited in me a desire to see Tjoritja (West MacDonnell Ranges) for myself. It has taken a couple of years, but with the generous support of the Minoru Hokari Memorial Scholarship, I finally had the opportunity to make my way to Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

Nothing ever goes entirely to plan on fieldwork, and this trip was all the better for it. I am indebted to the Iltja Ntjarra Art Centre for offering me a helping hand, especially their studio coordinator Tyler Arnold, who let me take the passenger seat for his weekly trip to the Tjuwanpa studio at Ntaria. There we spent a day painting with Marcus Wheeler, a senior law man and pastor, and his wife Betty, who was taught watercolours by her grandfather Albert Namatjira. We spread out copies of the children's drawings on the tables and a few local workers and residents wandered in to see them. Remembering the Old People who lived at Ntaria when they were young, Marcus and Betty generously helped to identify many of the Arranta child artists who had only signed their drawings with their first names. We soon learned that one drawing in the collection belonged to Betty's mother.

It has always seemed important to me that these artworks be properly attributed and connected back to their families, who are very often also copyright holders. For too long they have sat in storage in Canberra and a great deal more work needs to be done to return them to Iltja Ntjarra and the community. The fact that the artists were children should not diminish the importance of these drawings as works of art — one thing we can admire about Frances Derham is the way she fought to have children’s art and creativity taken seriously. For better or worse, it is no accident that her collection is held at the nation’s premier art gallery.

‘The fact that the artists were children should not diminish the importance of these drawings as works of art...’

The story of the child artists at the Finke River Lutheran Mission is one that enriches and broadens our understanding of the Hermannsburg Art Movement. While scholars have recognised that many of the most prominent Hermannsburg artists were first introduced to watercolour and landscape painting as children — whether by visiting artists or members of their own community — they have rarely been given attention in the history of that movement. Instead, there is often a clear distinction made between drawing as a child and beginning to paint ‘seriously’ in adulthood (e.g. exhibiting and selling). This is no doubt partly due to the importance placed on art as a source of economic security and stability for the Western Arranta community.

My research sets out to complicate that distinction: to treat children’s creative work seriously and recognise its importance as a form of meaning making and self-expression. Part of what I hope my book will do is deepen our understanding of the way culture and Country framed and enriched children’s creativity and imaginative life. Certainly, the Arranta drawings in the Derham collection survive as a powerful tribute to the way First Nations children sometimes used art to navigate colonisation and preserve their own culture.



Left: Iltja Ntjarra Art Studio, Hermannsburg. Right: Emily at Kwartatuma/Ormiston Gorge, Tjoritja/West MacDonnell Ranges. Photos: Emily Gallagher.

Convict colloquium

Matthew Cunneen & Nichola Garvey



Participants at the convict colloquium. Photo supplied by Nichola Garvey.

In mid-March, historians, genealogists, archaeologists, and biographical researchers gathered at History House in Sydney for a 'Colloquium on the Convict System and Early Colonial Society'. Over two days the program brought together leading scholars and emerging researchers to share new insights into Australian convict history, the social worlds of early New South Wales, and the global currents that shaped the colony's formation. Two National Centre of Biography PhD students – Nichola Garvey and Matthew Cunneen – featured on the program, reflecting the NCB's growing profile in the field.

Although wide-ranging in subject matter, the colloquium revealed a discipline that is both deepening in its archival sophistication and expanding outward into new analytical terrain. Sessions combined traditional social and political history with archaeological visualisation, digital humanities, big-data analysis, and global maritime perspectives. The event's atmosphere was one of intellectual generosity: senior scholars shared decades of accumulated knowledge, while newer researchers introduced methods and findings that are reshaping the field.

The opening session moved from medieval English criminal law to modern archaeological approaches. Deborah Oxley revisited the long arc of English penal practice, setting transportation within a broader continuum of criminal justice. Martin Gibbs demonstrated how spatial analysis and digital visualisation can illuminate the landscapes of punishment and production that convicts inhabited. Together, their papers anchored the conference in the dual importance of archival depth and methodological innovation.

The second session shifted focus to the social fabric of the early colony. Paula Jane Byrne examined domestic space in 1820s Sydney, revealing how where female ex-convicts lived, and their respective household arrangements, expressed power and dependency. Jan Barkley-Jack spoke about how ex-convicts were innovators and early adopters in the early colony, while Gary Sturgess explored the 'middling sort' of convict; men and women who did not fit neatly into traditional elite or labouring categories. These papers collectively emphasised the diversity and adaptability of early colonial society, complicating older narratives of rigid hierarchies.

Women's experiences were at the forefront of session three. Kathrine Reynolds and Carol Liston presented new research on female convicts, including the mothers of children in the Female Orphan School. The NCB's Nichola Garvey followed with a paper on the 'female trade' in the colony's economy, drawing on her doctoral research into the women of the Second Fleet transport *Neptune*. Nichola's research – biographical in method and economic in interpretive reach – demonstrated the vital role individual life stories play in uncovering the structures of early

interpretive reach — demonstrated the vital role individual life stories play in uncovering the structures of early colonial labour and gender.

Later sessions explored marriage patterns between convicts and free settlers, with Damian Gleeson and Perry McIntyre presenting new findings grounded in extensive genealogical and archival work. Their papers highlighted the fluidity of relationships in a frontier society and the role of marriage in social advancement, community formation, and identity.

The Saturday morning session offered a rare blend of technical analysis, institutional memory, and forward-looking reflection. Glen Lambert presented on his forensic and long-needed reconstruction of the identities of soldiers in the New South Wales Corps; Michael Flynn distilled 46 years of convict research into methodological insights derived from the NCB's sister project, the *Biographical Database of Australia*; and Mark McLean introduced the possibilities of artificial intelligence and data analytics for colonial history. David Roberts closed the session with an exploration of the appended evidence of the Bigge Commission, material long recognised as essential but now gaining new interpretive life through digital access and methodological refinement.

The final session placed the early colony into a broader Pacific and Atlantic framework. Here, the NCB was again represented through Matthew Cunneen, whose paper examined former convicts who left New South Wales between 1810 and 1819. His research challenges the longstanding assumption that transported convicts settled permanently in Australia, revealing instead a dynamic pattern of return migration, onward movement, and personal decision-making shaped by opportunities and constraints. This was followed by papers on Spanish Pacific routes used by convict escapees and on American trade in Port Jackson — reminders that the colony was never as isolated as it once seemed.

Across the two days, the colloquium demonstrated the vitality of research into Australia's convict system and early colonial history. Biography — long central to the field — has re-emerged as a crucial methodological anchor, helping scholars connect individual agency with structural forces. The contributions of NCB researchers were met with enthusiasm, underscoring the Centre's role in training the next generation of scholars who will push the field in new conceptual and geographic directions.

‘Biography – long central to the field – has re-emerged as a crucial methodological anchor, helping scholars connect individual agency with structural forces.’

The event closed with a discussion on the future of similar colloquia. If this gathering is any indication, the appetite for collaborative, inter-disciplinary exploration of Australia's colonial past remains strong. For the NCB, participation in such events strengthens our mission to illuminate lives, enrich national understanding, and contribute to the strengthening of digital history in Australia.

ABC TOP 5 residency

Shauna Bostock



Shauna during her TOP 5 residency: behind the microphone and at the news desk. Photos supplied by Shauna Bostock.

Back in June this year I was thrilled and honoured to win a place at the ABC TOP 5 Humanities Media Residency Program 2025. The ABC TOP 5 program is tailored for early-career researchers, and program graduates are equipped with career-long skills, knowledge, and confidence to communicate with media and their audiences about their field of expertise.

In mid-September we were flown to Sydney and accommodated at apartments in Darling Harbour, just a short walk from the ABC's main Sydney headquarters at Harris Street, Ultimo. The duration of the residency was two weeks, and the program was packed with practical lessons with specialist media trainers as well as a range of practitioners. The residency was hands-on as much as possible, enabling us to get an insight into how best to communicate our work to a wide audience. Examples of the residency sessions and experiences included:

- Learning how to retain your complex research ideas while presenting to a non-academic broad media audience.
- Meeting senior ABC journalists and producers and an introduction to the ABC's editorial policies.
- The chance to go behind the scenes of ABC audio and television.
- An introduction to the technical aspects of production and what to expect in both audio and television studio environments.
- Finding out what journalists and producers are looking for when seeking talent for stories.
- Hearing how to best pitch stories about one's specialist research.
- How to improve one's online discoverability and social media profiles.

On the second day of the residency I was interviewed by Larissa Berendt for the Indigenous program 'Speaking Out' (no pressure!) and my interview was aired on the Friday of that first week (you can still listen to it [online](#)). The ABC taught us the nuts and bolts of media. We learnt how to write for radio; we learnt about interviewing (including practice taking turns as the interviewer and the interviewee); we were coached on how to use our voice; we met producers who became our mentors for the residency; we were formally interviewed in the ABC studios; and our interviews went to air on Radio National's various programs.

We all learned so much and walked away from this residency feeling as though we had just been gifted a once in a lifetime opportunity. All of us were so grateful for this wonderful experience. I highly recommend that early-career researchers apply for this extraordinary residency in the future.

Ongoing research projects

Stephen Wilks, Karen Fox & Samuel Furphy

Stephen Wilks is (still) writing a book about Victoria's most famous and longest serving Premier, Henry Bolte, for publication by Connor Court. The focus is on how this seemingly unprepossessing individual, initially widely seen as a mere stopgap until the Victorian Liberals could find someone more suitable for the top job, lasted for all of seventeen years as a highly effective leader of his State. It will cover how he managed cabinet, the party room, and the State bureaucracy; his ideology; and his many dealings with the media, the business world, and the wider party organisation. Stephen will also be contributing a chapter on the Liberal-National Party coalition for the same publisher's forthcoming *The Fraser Era: A Reappraisal of Government, Politics and Policy*.

Karen is keeping busy, with several current research projects on the go. With Associate Professor Amanda Laugesen, she is undertaking a project entitled 'Uncovering Hidden Histories of Women and Colloquial Language in Australia' (ARC DP250101265). This project investigates the story of women and slang in Australia's history, exploring how women collected, recorded, engaged with, and wrote about colloquial language in Australia's past. She is also collaborating with Dr Michelle Staff and Professor Kim Rubenstein to prepare an edited collection arising from 'The Privilege of Trailblazing' workshop held at the ANU with support from the ANU Gender Institute (see pages 21–22 of this issue). Karen's other major research project is a reputational history of Australia, examining the nature of historical reputations in Australia, the history of fame, and how and why particular reputations shift over time.

Sam continues to research broadly in the field of Australian settler colonial and Aboriginal history, with a focus on policies of Aboriginal protection and the officers who implemented them. His journal article on the South Australian Protector of Aborigines Matthew Moorhouse (1813–76) was published in *Australian Historical Studies* in August and explored Moorhouse's growing interest in the racial sciences of craniology and phrenology. Sam's current projects include a co-written book chapter, 'Taking Ancestors to Foster International Trade,' which explores the trade in Aboriginal artefacts and human remains that occurred in the context of the international exhibitions of the nineteenth century. He is also rewriting the *ADB* entry on Henry Dana, captain of the Native Police Force in the Port Phillip District (Victoria) in the 1840s, which is one of the more pressing examples of an early *ADB* entry in need of revision.

Henry Edward Pulteney Dana (1820–1852)

by Marilynn I. Norman

This article was published:

- in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 1*, 1966
- online in 2006

[View Previous Version](#)

The ADB is aware that serious accusations have been made against Henry Dana. This article is being revised.

Henry Edward Pulteney Dana (1820–1852), soldier and police officer, was born in England, the eldest son of Captain William Pulteney Dana of the 6th Regiment, and related on his mother's



Sculpture of Phebe/Fama, the personification of fame/renown, by Robert Henze. Photograph: Wikimedia Commons.



Stephen's latest historical subject, Henry Bolte. Photograph: Museums Victoria.

Left: Sam is rewriting an *ADB* entry that requires urgent revision. Photograph: *ADB*.

Local history as biography

Peter Woodley

Soon after it was announced in Dubbo that I would be launching my book, *'We Are A Farming Class': Dubbo's Hinterland 1870-1950*, I received an email. A member of the Dubbo and District Family History Society, which would be hosting the event, asked if I would be talking about some particular families with connections to the district, and from whom my correspondent was descended. I replied that, no, her ancestors would not feature in the presentation, but hoped that she might find it interesting anyway.

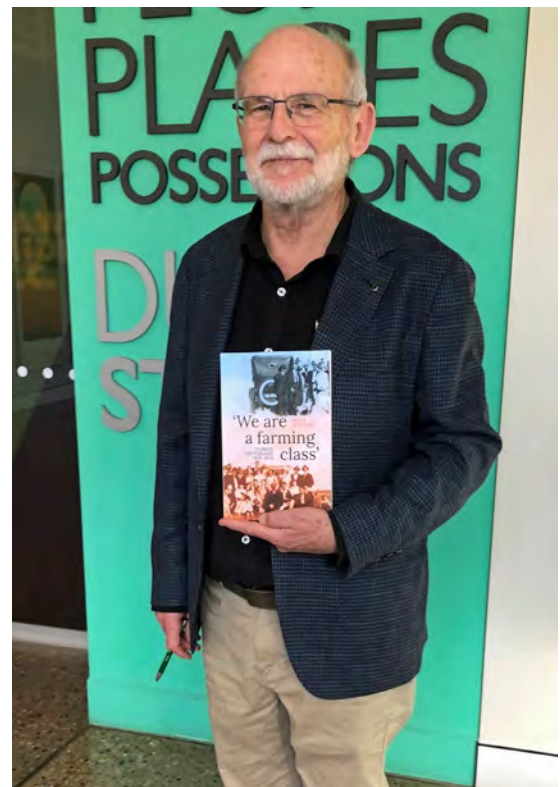
The exchange affirmed my resolve to give the event a biographical flavour. That would not be too much of a stretch. The book has at its core some questions about seemingly abstract concepts of community, class, and place. I argue, though, that these concepts are only evident in people's experiences, engagement (with one another), exchanges, consciousness, and sense of self. In terms of 'class', for example, I adopt E. P. Thompson's once groundbreaking idea that workers (he was principally concerned with a working class) were active and conscious participants in class formation. Class did not exist other than in their feeling and articulation of a common interest, arising from their experience of productive processes and their culture.

The book therefore explores the themes and questions by locating snippets of experience and expression in the lives of dozens of people. The subjects of the book — the settler-colonial farming people of that place and time — were not prolific diarists or collectors of correspondence, at least so far as I could discover. But their voices are preserved in various places, often in the letters they wrote to government departments and ministers and to local members, arguing or pleading for a tiny school to remain open, or for their soldier settlement loan instalment to be postponed because of a poor season or falling prices for their produce. Clearly, some voices are louder than others in this archive. Women were far from silent, but they were not equitably represented. With that caveat, the voices accumulate to give a strong sense of the ways class and place contributed to the ever-changing nature of communities, defining their values, who belonged, and who was excluded.

With all that in mind, I set out to give the Dubbo presentation a strongly biographical emphasis, conscious also that the Society's regular event, *Tell Your Story*, for which I was that month's instalment, typically features local people talking about their journey of researching and writing about their family's history. So while I was not going to deal specifically with my own family's history, I was able to frame the talk as revealing the stories of a range of people with a local connection — some of whom the audience was likely to be familiar with, but others not so well-known — whose lives in one way or another illustrated broader themes.

To take just a few examples, I introduced Selina Anderson, a firebrand of the Labor Party who, in 1907 in the village of Wongarbon near Dubbo, engaged a crowd of 250 people for two-and-a-half hours in a performance punctuated with humour and willing exchanges with the audience. In 1908 she married a Wellington man, and in 1922 represented Wellington as the first woman to attend the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers Association's annual conference as a delegate. That December she contested the federal seat of Calare at the general election, as an endorsed Country Party candidate, and campaigned for pre-maternity education for country women and care and education for country children. Her story illustrates the ways local communities engaged with politics, the fluid nature of party alignment in the early twentieth century, and women's important place in politics.

To give a sense of where power and influence lay in the Dubbo farmlands, I introduced the men who made up the Talbragar shire council. Formed in 1906, the shire encircled Dubbo with its population of farmers, labourers, railway



Peter with his book at the launch. Photo: Pauline Woodley.

workers, sleeper cutters, shopkeepers, and school teachers. Councillors were typically so-called 'successful farmers' and usually held several positions of local authority or responsibility: with progress associations, branches of the FSA, or the Pastures Protection Board. Several were members of a masonic lodge, and most (if not all) were Protestant. They formed virtual dynasties too, with a man's place on the council taken up by a son or a brother or a nephew, for generations. I made sure to give these people names though, so that they presented as recognisable individuals and families rather than aggregates of common characteristics. No women sought office in this period. Collectively, these families' stories and their connections with local government help to explain the values and hierarchies of farmlands communities, and who was entrusted to keep an eye on their interests.

The life of Bill Ferguson tells a different story. He was never likely to be elected a shire councillor, wasn't even a farmer, but his experience still contributes to an understanding of society in and around Dubbo. Born on the Warangesda Aboriginal reserve on the Murrumbidgee in 1882, Ferguson spent most of his life in the Central West, and eventually settled with his family in Dubbo where he organised groups of Aboriginal men to appear in parades and pageants, including the Back to Dubbo Week celebrations of 1935. He had his say when Aboriginal children

were excluded from the Brocklehurst primary school in 1935. He also formed the Aborigines Progressive Association at the Talbragar reserve just north of Dubbo in 1937, and campaigned for the reform of the government's Aborigines' Protection Board and its management of reserves across the State. With others he helped organise the Day of Mourning conference for Aboriginal people in Sydney in January 1938. I talked about the ways Ferguson's performances were presented and received, and how that helps to understand the ways settler-colonial people framed their own standing as compared with First Australians. His work around Dubbo in the 1930s also bore out the region's connections with wider debates and politics.

Though I had tailored the presentation to fit the event, it was nevertheless a book launch, and launches are performative — a type of theatre — so I need to acknowledge the rest of the cast. Local retired teacher and president of the Society, Linda Barnes, chaired the proceedings; Dubbo mayor Councillor Josh Black lent a certain gravitas; and through his presence and his words, Professor Frank Bongiorno signalled that local lives have a place in the broader canon of history writing.



Geoff Mann and Peter Woodley at another Dubbo book event. Photo: Frank Bongiorno.

Biography from Peru to Norway

Melanie Nolan

Melanie Nolan enjoyed a period of Outside Studies Program (OSP), research and study leave, from March to August 2025. She mostly worked on her current monograph, which is about groups in society. She accepted two invitations, however, which involved travel to Peru and Norway and were related to her book *Biography: An Historiography* (Routledge, 2023).

She was invited to give a paper in April on biography and historical studies to the Departamento de Humanidades, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, (PUCP: Pontifical Catholic University of Peru). Professor Pablo Quintanilla, Humanities Department, PUCP, hosted her visit. She spoke on 'Historians and the problem of linearity in discussions of biographical theories.' She was able to enjoy some time walking in the Amazon after visiting the PUCP on some annual leave.

Melanie was also invited to give an overview keynote paper on biography and microhistory ('Historians playing with the scale of history') to a workshop on Biographical and Microhistorical Perspectives on History at the Volda University College, Norway, in late August.

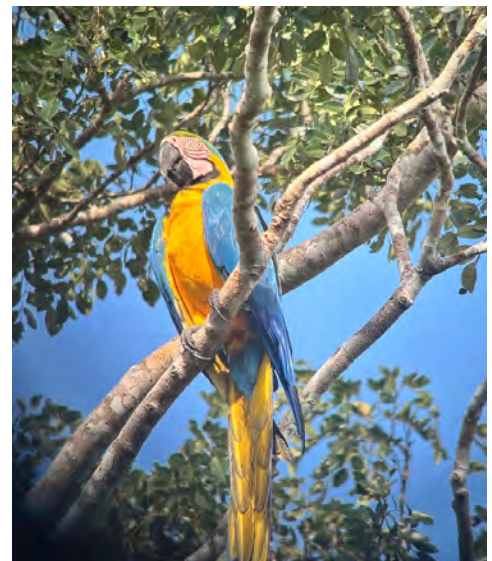
The College's Department of History offers an MA course in microhistory (one of the few postgraduate courses in the subject internationally), so this was a good opportunity to discuss microbiography. Her host was Professor Inger Marie Okkenhaug. On leave after the workshop, Melanie enjoyed some time hiking in the spectacular Lofoten Islands archipelago in northern Norway.



Melanie with commentators Daniella Wurst and Francesca Denegri at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Photo provided by Melanie Nolan.



Melanie with workshop organiser Inger Marie Okkenhaug and others in Norway. Photo provided by Melanie Nolan.



Bird-watching in the Amazon. Photo: Melanie Nolan.

***Playtime* brings a little bit of Play School to Canberra**

Emily Gallagher



Left: Play School's Justine Clarke with *Playtime* author Emily Gallagher. Photo: Katarina Pearson. Right: Frank Bongiorno, Emily Gallagher, and Joshua Black at the book launch. Photo: Ruby Ekkel.

In September the National Centre of Biography was joined by a very special guest, Play School presenter and actress Justine Clarke, who was in town to launch my new book, *Playtime: A History of Australian Childhood* (La Trobe University Press, 2025). The publication of a book is never a small achievement, and the evening was an opportunity to come together to celebrate many of the things that matter most to our community: research, history and books. We were hosted by our friends at Harry Hartog ANU.

Toys lined the window displays of Harry Hartog for a night. And Justine was a generous and gracious speaker. She reflected on the shared priorities and interests that unite Play School and *Playtime* while also speaking about some of the important differences:

'As someone who has spent many years presenting ABC TV's Play School, I can see so clearly the parallels between that beloved program and this remarkable book. Both remind us of something profound; that play is central to how children see themselves, how they make sense of the world, and how we adults should value childhood itself ... Through children's own writings, drawings, and reflections, Emily allows us to see the world not only as it was, but as children imagined it could be ... This is what makes Emily's work so ground-breaking. In Play School, adults create a world for children. But in *Playtime*, it is children themselves who are writing poems, diaries, letters, and observations. These voices remind us that imagination isn't a luxury, it's a right. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child tells us we must listen to children's views and give them due weight. This book does exactly that — carefully and generously elevating children to the place they deserve in our national story. *Playtime* is playful, yes — but it is also radical.'

To mark the publication of the book I wrote a [short piece](#) for the Australian Academy of Humanities, in which I also reflected on the radical potential of children's history.

One of the things that I hope *Playtime* does is offer readers an opportunity to reflect on their own childhood and family history, and the way we are all entangled in a larger national story. The book, like most children's histories, is not a history of great or extraordinary individuals and events, but rather a history of the everyday, of all the weird and wonderful imaginings that make up daily life. It is history that we are all part of.

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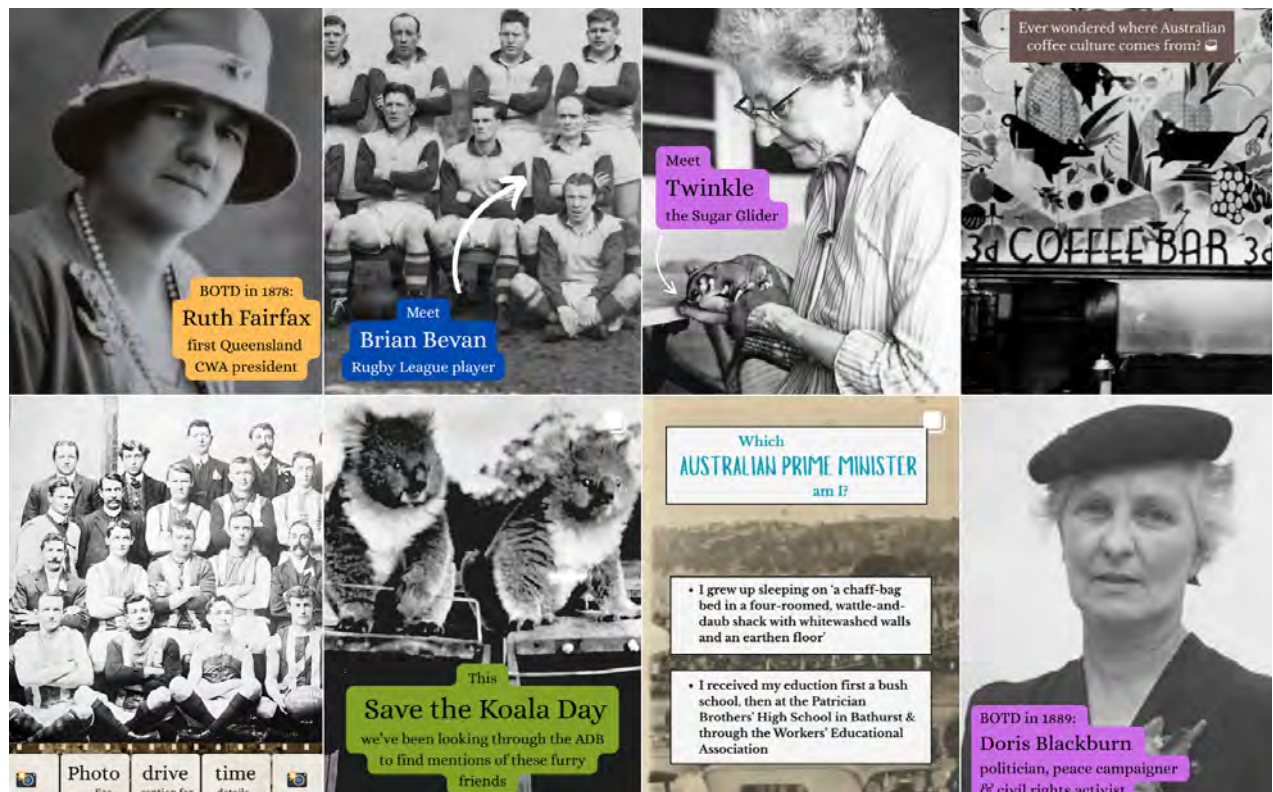
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Outreach & engagement



Just some of this year's social media posts. Photo: @ausdictionarybiography Instagram.

In 2025 we have continued to build our presence as a public history unit in the wider community.

This year we have worked on building our profile in the public history sphere. Much of this work has centred on our flagship project, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, which is the most recognisable and well-known of our activities.

We have explored different ways of telling stories through social media, including in collaboration with other institutions. We have also kept up the conversation with our colleagues in the GLAM sector and hosted various events throughout the year. Finally, we have started exploring how we can connect with budding historians in schools across the ACT.

We have exciting plans for our outreach portfolio for 2026 and beyond — watch this space!

Digital storytelling

Michelle Staff

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has traditionally been a textual medium. Concise written entries were first published in hardcover books, then later reproduced online. Indeed, our research editors are finely attuned to the nuances of word choice and how it frames a life.

But in this digital age we now have multiple ways of communicating these life stories. We have already delved into this by adding photographs and even sound recordings to many entries. Readers learning about [Joy Wigglesworth](#), for instance, can now see her youthful face as well as that of her adult self, and they can also listen to her singing the iconic Aeroplane Jelly jingle for which she is famous.

Social media is another space that allows us to experiment with different forms of audiovisual and digital storytelling. Our [Instagram](#) page in particular enables us to think creatively about what key ideas we want to share with the public. It is fascinating to see what posts attract the most engagement. This past year our audience has particularly resonated with our post on writer [Sumner Locke Elliott](#), which we shared during Pride Month. People also liked learning about the geologist and first woman professor in Australia, [Dorothy Hill](#), who featured on our grid during National Science Week.

It was not just humans who got the most attention though. The [Dogs of the ADB](#) post helped our audience meet their daily puppy pic quota and allowed us to shine a light on Adam the Great Dane, Rex the Terrier, Gigi and Jean the Poodles, and many more.

The digital landscape provides an important space for collaborating with other institutions. Co-hosted posts were easily our most far reaching, allowing us to speak to audiences beyond our own followers. Our entry on Canberra nurse Sylvia Curley coincided nicely with an exhibition about her at Canberra Museum and Gallery, meaning we could highlight the two at once in a [short video](#). Similarly our [Mr Squiggle](#) collaboration with the National Museum of Australia was very successful. And most recently we reached out to artist Peter Drew regarding his AUSSIE series for a [post](#). One of the women pictured in his line of posters, [Gladys Sym Choon](#), was also added to the ADB this year, and people loved learning more about the woman behind the image.

We look forward to experimenting further with digital storytelling in the months to come. Keep an eye out on our [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages for more.



Mr Squiggle, Dogs of the ADB & AUSSIE posts, 2025. Photos: @ausdictionarybiography Instagram.

ADB GLAM Advisory Group

Michelle Staff & Emily Gallagher

Readers may recall that in 2024 the *ADB* started forming new connections with institutions and people in the local GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector. This year, we brought these conversations together in a new forum: the *ADB* GLAM Advisory Group (GLAM AG).

The GLAM AG involves representatives from various organisations throughout the Canberra region, including the National Archives of Australia, the National Museum of Australia (NMA), the Australian War Memorial, Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG), the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), and the Museum of the Riverina. Our conversations have been very productive and wide-ranging, covering topics such as the interoperability of our digital platforms, opportunities for collaboration (especially in relation to outreach and social media), and advice on topics of increasing interest to public audiences.



Norman Hetherington OAM (and friends) 2008, by Kate Rae. National Portrait Gallery of Australia. © Kate Rae.

The first of the group's official collaborations came to fruition this year. To coincide with the NMA's recent exhibition *Mr Squiggle and Friends: The Creative World of Norman Hetherington* (4 July–13 October 2025), we published an out-of-period *ADB* entry on the man behind Australia's favourite puppet. Curator Dr Sophie Jensen authored our short biography of Norman Hetherington, many extracts of which made it onto the gallery walls in the exhibition itself. The NMA provided several photographs of Hetherington and his creations to illustrate the piece, and the NPG helped us add the amazing 2008 portrait painted by Kate Rae from their collection. Now that this very popular exhibition is over, the entry serves as a permanent and public record of the research that went into it, which would otherwise usually be filed away.

For another collaboration we visited CMAG's exhibition on Sylvia Curley, who was born at Duntroon Estate and later became a deputy matron at the old Canberra Community Hospital. In a stroke of good luck, we published Curley's *ADB* entry – written by the curator and heritage consultant Elaine Lawson – while the exhibition was open. Our research editor Emily twice visited *Mugga-Mugga Cottage* in Canberra's south, where Curley spent part of her childhood, and which she later successfully fought to have protected as a historic site. We joined forces with CMAG to create a [video](#) for social media that showcased the objects on display and put them in the context of Curley's life, pointing viewers to both the exhibition and the entry.

The GLAM AG group is thinking creatively about biography and the role it plays in both academia and public history. One of the questions we have been pondering is: what can we do to tell the life stories of non-human subjects, such as animals? Animals feature in many *ADB* entries as beloved pets and objects of study, but what if we took them as subjects in their own right? This is a topic we look forward to exploring together over the course of 2026.



How might we tell the life story of Mollie the orangutang? (Melbourne Zoo, 1921). Photo: State Library of Victoria.

Biography Workshop

Stephen Wilks

The NCB hosted ten biography workshops during 2025, convened by Dr Stephen Wilks as coordinator and chair. The full array of expert speakers who so generously gave their time is listed on the [NCB's website](#).

Topics ranged from Greg De Moore's presentation on 'Finding Sanity: John Cade, Lithium, and the Taming of Bipolar Disorder', to Rebe Taylor on 'Extinction, Survival, Resurgence: Indigenous Women Framed as the "Last" of their Peoples', and Matthew Lamb on 'Strange Paths: Frank Moorhouse and His Times'. Andrew Levidis provided a remarkable insight into postwar Japan with his 'Memory of Empire: Kishi Nobusuke and the Radicalism of a Conservative.'

Very personal contributions were provided by Shauna Bostock on 'Reaching Through Time: Finding my Family's Stories', by Jessica Jacobson on 'Dan Jacobson and the Story of a South African Family: A Collaborative Memoir', and by Theo Ell on 'Lebanon Days and Les Murray: The Memoirist Turned Biographer'.

It was the NCB's privilege to host these ten scholars and writers of talent, and to hear about their projects and books. Our Biography Workshops help to impart the excitement of biography as history. Speakers not only stressed the importance of biography as a literary form, but also raised questions of research and method, often grappling with challenges of organisation, unanswered questions, and reactions from readers. Some were still works in progress. We aim for variety, creativity, and interest.

Michelle Staff will be managing the 2026 Biography Workshops. Stephen Wilks sends his thanks to her for her support over the past three years, to Karen Ciuffetelli for vital administrative assistance, to speakers, and to all participants. The program for 2026 will soon be available to view online. Keep an eye on the events page of the NCB website for details!



Japanese prime minister Kishi Nobusuke. Photo: supplied by Andrew Levidis.



Melamed family, Lithuania, 1920. Photo: supplied by Jessica Jacobson.

In conversations at Harry Hartog

Michelle Staff



Kerrie Davies in conversation with Michelle Staff. Photo: Katarina Pearson.

In addition to our usual program of events, this year staff at the NCB hosted three in-conversation evenings at Harry Hartog bookstore on campus at the ANU. Each event brought together an engaged and varied audience, allowing us to share our work with the wider ANU and Canberra communities.

First up, Emily Gallagher organised and moderated a session with historian Dr Cath Bishop from Macquarie University about her latest book *The World We Want: The New York Herald Tribune World Youth Forum and the Cold War Teenager* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2024). Cath has a long history with the ANU, having completed her PhD here, and it was wonderful to hear these two scholars of childhood and youth discuss questions at the heart of the book. In July, Dr Kerrie Davies from UNSW visited Canberra to talk about *Miles Franklin Undercover* (Allen & Unwin, 2025). Kerrie spoke with the NCB's Michelle Staff about why she chose to tell this 'slice of life' story about Franklin and how she used creative non-fiction to do so. Finally, in August we hosted the last of our three events: a conversation with Sita Sargeant, founder of tour company She Shapes History and the recently announced ACT Young Australian of the Year. Sita's book *She Shapes History: Guided Walks and Stories About Great Australian Women* (Hardie Grant, 2025) translates the essence of her company's tours into print form and expands its remit to cover places across Australia. We had a very interesting conversation about public history from the perspective of biography and writing about the lives of people from the past.

Many thanks to Katarina Pearson from Harry Hartog ANU for helping us deliver these wonderful conversations. We were very sorry to hear the recent news that the store will not reopen in 2026, which is a major loss to the community. We had been preparing a special series for next year in collaboration with Katarina and Harry Hartog and will now need revisit the topic to explore how else we might deliver such events in the new year.



Sita Sargeant and Michelle Staff. Photo: Katarina Pearson.

Academics meet young historians

Michelle Staff

An important part of being a historian is connecting with up-and-coming future scholars and showing them what it means to have a career in history.

In conjunction with the ACT History Teachers' Association (ACTHTA), in November I helped coordinate an afternoon of talks and workshops given by ANU academics for senior secondary school students.

The event was hosted at Canberra Grammar School and included students from across the ACT. It consisted of both an ancient and modern stream. Colleagues from the ANU's School of History and Centre for Classical Studies (SLLL) came together to deliver an amazing program.

In the modern history stream we focused on two of the major events of the twentieth century. Dr Romain Fathi from the School of History spoke to the students about the First World War and had them consider various objects, from shells and bullets to tanks, and what they reveal about experiences of the conflict. His was a lively talk that highlighted the sorts of questions historians ask of their sources.

In the second session Professor Frank Bongiorno gave a talk on the Second World War and encouraged the students to think critically about how the nation frames our understandings of that period. They were introduced to various primary sources that historians consult in their research, including Curtin's famous 'The Task Ahead.' His sessions gave the class a taste of what it is like to study history at university.

Over in the ancient stream, Professor Caillan Davenport led a session on the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, clarifying important concepts that help us understand the Roman empire. His talk was complemented by a hands-on workshop in which curator of the ANU Classics Museum, Dr Georgia Pike-Rowney, brought Roman coins for the students to study closely. (Fun fact: Georgia is the granddaughter of the *ADB*'s founding editor, Douglas Pike!)

Dr Tatiana Bur rounded off the day with a lecture on religion in Ancient Greece. She highlighted how looking beyond 'official' expressions of religion reveals how diverse spiritual practice across the Greek world was. After her talk the students once again donned their gloves and handled various objects from the museum.

I think it is fair to say that the day was a great success. The students were smart, enthusiastic, and highly engaged, and all the academics enjoyed the opportunity to connect with them.

Thanks to the ACTHTA, especially president Becky Gill and Canberra Grammar School's Alex Thompson, for helping us with this collaboration. We look forward to running a day like this again in 2026, and to expanding our relationship with the ACTHTA as well. We are planning to use the wonderful resource that is the *ADB* as the basis for some sessions in the near future.



Above, the modernists: Frank Bongiorno & Romain Fathi with teacher Alex Thompson. Below, the classicists: Tatiana Bur, Caillan Davenport & Georgia Pike-Rowney. Photos: Michelle Staff.

ANU Press



Front covers of ANU Press publications 2025. Photos: ANU Press.

In partnership with ANU Press the NCB publishes biographical research in a range of formats.

In 2025 we published two issues of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*. Number 9 was edited by members of the ADB's Oceania Working Party and focuses on 'Oceania Lives'. Number 10 appeared in December and includes a wide range of fascinating articles. As founding editor Dr Malcolm Allbrook retired in June, NCB academic Dr Sam Furphy has taken over the editorial reins.

This year has also seen the publication of three new titles in the Biography Series: the tenth edition of Barry Jones' *Dictionary of World Biography*; Erik Eklund's *Politics, Pride and Perversion: The Rise and Fall of Frank Arkell*; and Madeleine Regan's *'I buy this piece of ground here': An Italian Market-Gardener Community in Adelaide, 1920s-1970s*. We spotlight each of these in the following pages.

Oceania Lives

Australian Journal of Biography and History, no. 9 (2025), ANU Press, <http://doi.org/10.22459/AJBH.09.2025>

The ninth issue of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* (AJBH), guest-edited by Talei Luscia Mangioni, Dr Nicholas Hoare, and Professor Katerina Teaiwa, centred on 'Oceania Lives'. As the editors explain in their introduction, this special issue represents 'a culmination of several years of collaborative biographical research and dialogue by the Oceania Working Party (OWP) of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB). The OWP 'is a Pacific-led working group of Pacific studies scholars, artists, community workers and public figures from across Australia who are concerned with the sharing and telling of Pacific lives in the lands now known as Australia', and holds a central objective: 'to focus on nurturing a sustainable environment of intellectual curiosity and generative academic debate about how we can, and should, do Pacific biography.' This journal issue captures that spirit and shows us what sorts of work is being undertaken in the field in this moment.

AJBH no. 9 showcases a wide range of research in the field of Pacific biography and includes work on and by many Pacific peoples, including South Sea Islanders/Australian South Sea Islanders, Papua New Guineans, Tongans, Pitcairners, West Papuans, Solomon Islanders, and Fijians. A central theme throughout the articles is an exploration of 'Australian coloniality'. The issue includes two dialogue pieces, which emerged from public events hosted by the OWP. In the first Melinda Mann, Kim Kruger, and Imelda Miller discuss their approaches to writing South Sea Islander biography, and in the second Lisa Hilli explores her approaches to art and biography in conversation with Wendy Mocke.

This issue also contains four other reflective pieces: a reimagining of the early nineteenth-century voyage of Futukava to Australia; a poetic response to an archival note; reflections on a biography of Solomon Mamaloni; and a tribute to Professor Brij Lal. Finally there are three research articles, including a piece on the Fijian Amelia Rokotuivuna; one on the Black Sistaz from West Papua; and an article on the *Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography*.

On the publication of 'Oceania Lives' the editors took over the ADB's social media accounts to spotlight each of these contributions to the journal. Talei Luscia Mangioni created the visuals to share snippets from each piece and give our audience a taste of what is inside this open-access journal. You can see some examples of these wonderful posts below, and of course, you can access all the content free online via ANU Press.



AJBH no. 9 social media posts. Photos: @ausdictionarybiography Instagram.

AJBH no. 10

Samuel Furphy

Australian Journal of Biography and History, no. 10 (2025), <http://doi.org/10.22459/AJBH.10.2025>

For those interested in some summer reading, the tenth issue of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* (AJBH) was published on 18 December. This is the final edition of the journal under the leadership of its founding editor, Dr Malcolm Allbrook, who retired in July. AJBH no. 10 is a general issue and includes eight research articles and twelve book reviews.

As Malcolm notes in his introduction, the issue includes biographical studies of a diverse range of people who lived on the edges of societal expectations and norms, raising questions about Australian identity. Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui relates the story of the Welsh-born writer John Naish (1923–1963), who produced a significant body of literature on life in the sugar cane industry and Queensland's tropical north. James Cotton examines the two years that Edward Selby Little spent as Australian trade commissioner in Shanghai (1921–1923), a brief and unhappy but still portentous career. Georgina Fitzpatrick's portrait of Eric Shimada (Shimada Masakazu) considers his transformation from Japanese soldier to interpreter for the Australian and British occupation forces and then the International Military Tribunal in Japan. And in his article 'A Cat with Two Tales', Andrew Marshall examines the conflict between the Australian-born cartoonist and entrepreneur Patrick Sullivan and the American illustrator Otto Messmer over who was the rightful creator of the popular cartoon character Felix the Cat.

Two of the articles spotlight First Nations stories. James McDonald uses collective biographical methods to discuss the way the largely forgotten racist term 'King Billy' was deployed in colonial Australia to diminish and mock the status of senior Aboriginal men. Similarly, Toby Raeburn, Paul Sanders, and Kerry Doyle, in their article 'Boorong of the Burrumattagal', elevate the status of a young Aboriginal woman from indentured servant to important cultural and linguistic intermediary.

Finally, in this issue there is also a focus on people's private lives. Kate White's article 'Creating the Mirage' considers the private along with the public lives of the 1980s business couple Christopher and Pixie Skase. This private world is also the focus of Kay Whitehead and Belinda MacGill in their article on Annie Sharpley, a teacher at Naracoorte. While Sharpley's career seems extraordinary in length, the selfless woman teacher in a country school is a typical personification of rural education in settler countries such as Australia.

The National Centre of Biography thanks Malcolm Allbrook for his tireless work establishing AJBH over the last seven years. For information about the journal, or to discuss a submission, contact the new editor, Dr Samuel Furphy: samuel.furphy@anu.edu.au.



Front cover of AJBH no. 10. Photo: ANU Press.

Recognition for Erik Eklund in 2025 book prizes

Michelle Staff with Erik Eklund

Earlier this year Erik Eklund's book *Politics, Pride and Perversion: The Rise and Fall of Frank Arkell* was published in our Biography Series with ANU Press. In it Erik tackles the controversial and complicated character of the former Wollongong mayor and NSW politician. 'I wrote this biography because Frank Arkell was such a significant person in Wollongong's political history,' says Erik. And while the material was 'at times deeply troubling and disturbing,' he found writing this biography — his first — 'a rewarding experience.'

Erik has met various readers throughout the year who were drawn to the book for different reasons. 'Some readers have told me that they wanted to see the evidence about Arkell's illicit practices laid out in forensic detail,' he explains, 'whilst others were more interested in the politics of the era and the battle between Arkell and the Labor party.' This biography spotlights a subject 'who led a completely double life,' as Erik puts it. As such, it contains multiple, and sometimes conflicting, stories.

During the process of writing it, Erik spoke to victim/survivors of this era. While some 'preferred to leave this part of their lives in the past,' Erik explains that others 'found the book validated their experiences and memories.' 'We should never underestimate the cultural authority of a book,' he reminds us.

'We should never underestimate the cultural authority of a book.'

— AUTHOR ERIK EKLUND

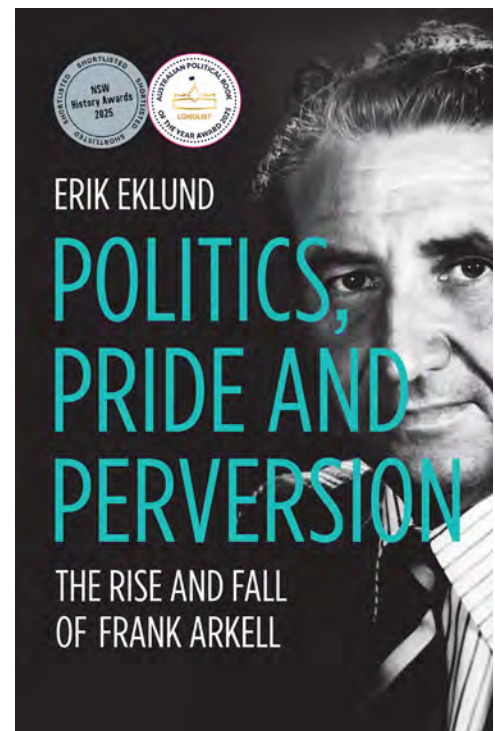
The quality of Erik's work has been recognised in the short and long lists of multiple history book prizes this year. We were especially pleased to see *Politics, Pride and Perversion* secure a place on the 2025 Australian Political Book of the Year Award Longlist.

The book was also shortlisted for the NSW Community and Regional History Prize at the NSW History Awards. The judges comments highlight the skill with which Erik approached his thorny subject:

'Politics, Pride and Perversion masterfully transports the reader to mid-to late twentieth-century Wollongong — a time of transition from industrial to postindustrial economy, and where silence about child sexual abuse was the norm. Erik Eklund convincingly uses the life of former independent mayor and NSW parliamentarian Frank Arkell to highlight a changing city and politics, along with an underbelly of social ills.

Drawing on oral histories, newspapers, and court and police records, Eklund spotlights how Arkell challenged the political establishment — until his popularity came crashing down when allegations of his involvement in child sexual abuse rings led to criminal charges and his murder. Eklund skilfully shows how someone who was anti-establishment ultimately became the corrupt establishment. *Politics, Pride and Perversion* is a compelling read that uses Arkell and Wollongong as the subjects, but Eklund shows them to be universally representative of abuse of power and community trust.'

Congratulations to Erik on these wonderful achievements!



Politics, Pride and Perversion by Erik Eklund.
Photo: ANU Press.

Barry Jones' *Dictionary of World Biography*

Stephen Wilks

This article was first published on the [NCB website](#) on 3 June 2025.

The *Dictionary of World Biography* (DWB) by Barry Jones, public intellectual, former politician, and eternal polymath, is a very dangerous book indeed — but in the benign sense that once opened it is so engrossing as to be hard to put down. It also is one of the world's great works of reference. Its latest iteration was recently published by ANU Press in the Biography Series, an initiative of the National Centre of Biography.

This tenth ANU Press edition — not the last, Barry tells us — was celebrated on 29 May at an event hosted in Melbourne by the Redmond Barry Society. The venue was the Ian Potter Queen's Hall, the glorious historic core of the State Library of Victoria a.k.a. 'the people's university', as CEO Paul Duldig describes it. Maxine McKew introduced a conversation between Barry and former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull that ranged across the case for such a book, contemporary political culture, and the future of the printed word, no less.

The DWB has a complex publication history dating back to 1952 (yes!), detailed in Barry's autobiography *A Thinking Reed* (2006). In 2011 Garry Sturgess encouraged the NCB to exhume and revise what Barry calls fondly 'my obsession'. Professors Melanie Nolan and Tom Griffiths proposed that it appear both as an ebook and in traditional printed form, while from 2013 Christine Fernon worked as Barry's editor and encourager, 'with patience (well, mostly), good humour and erudition.'

This book is worth reading for its elegant introduction alone. Barry writes that 'the shock of recognition', also the title of another of his books (2016), 'examines the impact of self-discovery after exposure to, or immersion in, the uncanny, the challenging, the transcendental, relating the specific to the universal, the immediate to the timeless, the individual to all humanity'.

The latest edition runs to nearly 1,000 pages encompassing about 9,100 entries, all written by Barry himself. It is far more than a 'born, lived, died' collection of lifelessly worded life summaries. Barry's self-declared magnum opus is, he says, 'highly personal and opinionated, even semi-autobiographical.' This includes reflecting his ability to 'see patterns and interactions long before others', amounting to 'a framework of relationships between the living and the dead' akin to 'a sculptor's armature'.



Malcolm Turnbull in conversation with Barry Jones at the State Library of Victoria. Photo: Stephen Wilks.

Barry concedes his being 'far more familiar with the culture of Europe, and its North American and Australian extensions, than of other continents', but has tried hard to identify figures from across the globe for inclusion. The *DWB* also gave him 'opportunities for reappraisal of women, so often grossly under represented', hence the presence of Hatshepsut, Hildegard of Bingen, Olympe de Gouges, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Nadezhda von Meck, Louise Bourgeois, Vera Rubin, and Margaret Fuller.



Stephen Wilks, Melanie Nolan, Barry Jones & Christine Fernon.
Photo: Rachel Faggetter.

Innumerable anecdotes enliven and encapsulate. One of the author's favourites concerns Anton Chekhov: 'His funeral was Chekhovian: the coffin was taken to Moscow by train in a refrigerated car intended for oysters, and the funeral procession was confused with a general's, accompanied by a military band.' Amongst the liberal smattering of Australian figures, we learn of the great social reformer Caroline Chisholm that 'Dickens satirised her, unfairly, as Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House*'. The entry on James Joyce concludes tellingly with a list of other great writers denied the Nobel Prize for Literature that includes Ibsen, Tolstoy, Zola, Hardy, Conrad, Wells, Orwell, Levi, Gorki, Proust, Woolf, Kafka, Borges, Nabokov, Malraux, and Auden. Naturally, all are subjects in the *DWB*.

Barry has a marked ability to draw minimalist but telling word pictures of subjects. Of Harold Macmillan he writes: 'with Attlee he was the only British Prime Minister in three centuries wounded in action; he had the unhappiest prime ministerial marriage since Lord Melbourne; and was the best-read Prime Minister since Gladstone.' Much personal detail is little known. Abraham Lincoln 'had a high pitched, penetrating voice, awkward hands and movements', was 'the first bearded president', and 'may have suffered from Marfan's syndrome, a hereditary heart and bone disease'. Bold, big calls on wider history include

that 'the great overall postwar rise in prosperity in the developed countries and the absence of catastrophic unemployment is largely due to Keynes.'

'Vast, cerebral, and all-encompassing, it is the recommended desert island book for anyone interested in biography, history, and humanity itself.'

The *DWB* is indeed, as Malcolm Turnbull put it, a work 'that encourages you to browse'. Vast, cerebral, and all-encompassing, it is the recommended desert island book for anyone interested in biography, history, and humanity itself.

Available free online, and for purchase in hardcover, via [ANU Press](#).

Launch of *'I buy this piece of ground here'*

Kiera Lindsay

The following text is an extract from a speech delivered by Dr Kiera Lindsay at the Adelaide book launch of Madeleine Regan's 'I buy this piece of ground here': An Italian market-gardener community in Adelaide 1920s–1970s on 19 July 2025.

I Buy This Piece of Ground is a book that is alive with voices, your voices and the voices of your ancestors. Thanks to the passionate and painstaking work of its author, Madeleine Regan, AND your work with her, this wonderful book has peopled this part of Adelaide's west with lives that matter; lives which have made generations of family as well as meaningful contributions to the wider community, all while working hard, very hard to make a living. This is also a book about lives which have been neglected from the historical record but can tell us much about who we have

been and who we might become.



Kiera Lindsay helps launch Madeleine Regan's new book. Photo: Alex Bennett.

This book started with a box. A pine box. Or to be more precise, a humble half-case. Stamped with 'Tomatoes Grown by G & E Marchioro', this half-case was manufactured by the father of Madeleine's friend Aida, Angelo Innocente, who migrated to Australia from a small village in Treviso in 1950. As Madeleine recounts in the opening pages of her book, Angelo and his wife Elsa, collected pine from a mill, some 60 kilometres away, taking it to a small factory near their home. At the factory the Innocentes produced some 1,000 boxes each day which they then sold onto the Veneto Market-gardeners so they could transport their tomatoes into town.

But as well as tomatoes, this humble-half case also carried something else that grew out of the soil of Adelaide's West — and that is your stories.

I find myself thinking about Johnny Marchioro's mud map, which he drew for Madeleine while describing what it was like to grow up among a culture which had been, quite literally transplanted from the Veneto by 19 single men, a married couple, and an infant who brought with them ancient agricultural traditions when they first arrived here without 'plans, prospects or many resources' in the 1920s. Although Frogmore road is now lined with established homes all 'jooshed up' with aircon, widescreen televisions, and fancy coffee machines, I keep imagining the tents, iron shacks and cowsheds where Gino Berno and other early Veneto people lived, as well as the horror of the wives when they first arrived only to find 'hovels — bare and empty with no gas, no firewood, no electricity and no floor'.

By telling these stories, your stories, this book addresses an important gap in our urban migration history and makes an outstanding contribution to oral, industrial, economic, and political history. And yet, for me what is so memorable about this book is the fact that it confirms my long-held speculation, that all truly meaningful South Australian histories are innately concerned with community.

At the beating heart of this book is a story about how your community transformed a strange place into home; how you created a sense of place and how you learnt to belong — to one another — helping each other out with everyday issues and economic challenges again and again. As such, this book reminds us that belonging and community can only happen when we put aside our differences and strive for a common cause together.

‘By telling these stories, your stories, this book addresses an important gap in our urban migration history and makes an outstanding contribution to oral, industrial, economic, and political history.’

It is also important to acknowledge that for the Veneto of Lockleys, this South Australian story began as one of survival and involved enormous hardships and hostilities during the interwar and depression years. This book does not shy away from accounts of racism suffered by early generations who were repeatedly excluded from economic and educational opportunity. While those shadow stories filled me with shame as an Australian, I was also uplifted by the inspiring way your story of surviving soon became one of thriving.

This book reminds us that even as we stay grounded in our local contexts we must also expand our sense of belonging to incorporate diverse and different people and places, cultures and communities. And so, in conclusion, I want to thank you, the Veneto community — and not only for making me feel welcome today — but also for coming to South Australia and staying here. On behalf of all people of the west, I also want to thank you for making Lockley the place where you chose to put down roots and live this powerful human story.

Last, but by no means least, I congratulate Madeleine Regan for producing a book that has mastered an often under-appreciated but critical paradox intrinsic to all really good history. While *I Buy This Piece of Ground Here* is deeply grounded in the local history of your community, at the same time it is also a story about the human experience and the way it is nurtured and sustained by community and that is undoubtedly a global and timeless story. A story as old, perhaps even older, than the Veneto itself.



The audience at the book launch included people interviewed for the project, market gardeners' descendants & many others. Photo: Alex Bennett.

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