1. 'Insufficiently Engineered': A Dictionary Designed to Stand the Test of Time?

Melanie Nolan

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography's* genealogy

In May 1962 Sir Keith Hancock, Professor of History and Director of the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS), appeared before the ANU Council to put the case for funding the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB). The ADB Editorial Board had appointed Douglas Pike as general editor of the dictionary in January 1962 but there was no provision in Hancock's budget for the position. Boldly, Hancock went to the council to convince it to cover Pike's appointment. He hoped to also convince council members to release funds for the appointment of research staff.¹

Hancock began by discussing the ADB's 'prehistory': how the idea for an Australian dictionary had 'been in the minds of historians in various parts of Australia for ten years or more'; how Laurie Fitzhardinge had started a National Register (later called the Biographical Register) in the history department in 1954; how a conference of Australian historians, held at The Australian National University (ANU) in 1957, gave their general support for the dictionary project and how, after wide consultation, an editorial board, headed by Hancock, had met for the first time in 1960.²

1 W. K. Hancock, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography' (12 April 1962), Minutes, ANU Council meeting (11 May 1962), 567/1962, box 1, series 245, ANU Archives [hereinafter ANUA], p. 3 [reprinted here as Document 1]. Separately, Hancock also had to request the council to make Pike's a professorial appointment, which then had to be subject to an electoral committee process: Minutes, ANU Council meeting (30 April 1962), 639/1962, box 1, series 245, ANUA.

2 Hancock Notes, box 69, Q31, ADB archives [hereinafter ADBA], ANUA. Hancock's prehistory paper has not survived but his speaking notes were comprehensive. The ADB's provisional Editorial Board met for the first time on 19 June 1959; the first ADB Editorial Board meeting was held, jointly with the National Advisory Panel meeting, on 23 April 1960.

ADB promotional poster, produced by Melbourne University Press, about 1992

Source: ADB archives

Hancock was also keen for the ANU Council to be aware that the idea of a national biographical dictionary had 'deep roots' in the Western world. A few months earlier he had had a background paper prepared on other national dictionary projects. He also scattered around the council table copies of the British *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), which he referred to as the 'senior member of the family'.³ He argued that the genesis for national biographical dictionaries was often associated with the massive wave of biographical writing that occurred in Victorian Britain. The role of the individual in history was emphasised by the great historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle, who, following Georg Hegel's lead, declared that 'no great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men', and that 'history is the essence of innumerable biographies'.⁴ The nineteenth-century era of nationalism witnessed the great national dictionary of biography projects throughout Europe, including the French *Biographie Universelle* (1811–62) and the German *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1875–1912). These were massive collaborations that produced series of volumes of concise, alphabetically ordered entries. In their wake, the DNB published 63 volumes between 1885 and 1900 and then decadal supplements.⁵ Some have characterised these dictionaries as triumphant ships sailing 'through the second half of the nineteenth century unshakably confident' of their 'values and virtues', 'legitimizing unified national identity'.⁶ Hancock prosaically employed the language of usefulness: an Australian dictionary of biography would be a useful record for research and a good vehicle for ANU university politics.⁷

The impulse to create a multi-volume collaborative dictionary of biography came later in Australia than in Britain and Europe and made a dictionary project in the 1960s all the more timely. Early Australian dictionaries of biography were neither comprehensive—many required that subjects pay a fee to be included—nor did they involve systematic research: fee-paying subjects tended to write their own biographies. J. Henniker Heaton's *Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Time* (1879) set the tone, recording the lives of 550 men and eight women. David Blair's *Cyclopaedia of Australasia* (1881), Everard Digby's *Australian Men of Mark* (1889) and Philip Mennell's *The Dictionary of Australasian Biography*

3 'Notes on Dictionaries of National Biography', Memo, Ann Mozley to Professor Hancock (13 March 1962), and material in box 73, Q31 ADBA, ANUA; and W. K. Hancock, 'The Family Experience', in 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography', box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

4 Thomas Carlyle, 'On History' (1830), republished in G. B. Tennyson (ed.), *A Carlyle Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 57. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History. Six Lectures* (London: James Fraser, 1841), p. 47.

5 Stefan Collini, 'Our Island Story', *London Review of Books*, 27, no. 2 (20 January 2005), pp. 3–8.

6 Iain McCalman, with Jodi Parvey and Misty Cork (eds), *National Biographies and National Identity* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, 1996), p. iv.

7 Lawrence Goldman, 'A Monument to the Victorian Age? Continuity and Discontinuity in the Dictionaries of National Biography 1882–2004', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 11, no. 1 (2006), pp. 111–32.

from the *Inauguration of Responsible Government* (1892) followed. The last, while largely reliable, did not include Arthur Phillip, Lachlan Macquarie or John Macarthur.

Fred Johns began his series of volumes—*Johns's Notable Australians*—in 1906, and in 1934 he published *An Australian Biographical Dictionary* containing about 3000 biographies. The average length of each entry was 90 words. *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, published in 1925–26, focused on prominent achievers.

Percival Serle was the next to take up the challenge, publishing 1030 biographies in his two-volume *Dictionary of Australian Biography* in 1949. It was a mammoth task. An accountant by profession, Serle began collecting biographical information about Australians in 1929. Ten years later, and by then in his mid seventies, he decided to compile a dictionary, and during the next five years set himself the task of writing four lives a week; the average article length was 640 words.⁸ It was a marvellous accomplishment, though it also showed, as Laurie Fitzhardinge later commented, that '[t]his is the best that can be done by one man. It's better than anything that went before. It makes it clear that this is no longer a one-man job. It's got to be a team job on the model of the *DNB*'.⁹

The idea of a collaborative national dictionary of Australia had been taking shape in the minds of a number of prominent Australian historians, Hancock told the ANU Council: 'Frank Crowley in Western Australia ... [Manning] Clark in Canberra and Laurie Fitzhardinge who, although "the last person to claim proprietorship"', was first on Hancock's list of the dictionary's direct forebears to be commended.¹⁰

Fitzhardinge's love affair with dictionaries of biography was rooted in his schooldays at a boarding school, in the aftermath of World War I, where, on wet Sunday afternoons, students were permitted to read reference books from the school library. Fitzhardinge chose the *DNB*: 'I devised games, dodging about in it, opening a volume at random and then following all the cross references and following up the cross references to that and so on'.¹¹ His love affair continued while working as a reference officer at the Commonwealth National Library (1934–46), where he found himself using Australian dictionaries constantly in his work. At the same time, he was writing a biography of Littleton Groom, the son of a convict who went on to become a long-serving federal politician, and found that, 'with one or two exceptions, it was very difficult to get even the most elementary background information' on subjects in Australian history.

8 Percival Serle, *Dictionary of Australian Biography* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1949), Preface.

9 Laurie Fitzhardinge, Interview by Barbara Ross, 4–26 March 1987, TRC 2159, transcript, National Library of Australia [hereinafter NLA], Canberra. See also J. A. La Nauze, Review of P. Serle, *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, 4, no. 16 (1951). It should be noted that, while the *DNB* was a team effort, just 100 individuals wrote three-quarters, with Stephen Lee writing 820 articles and Leslie Stephen 378.

10 Keith Hancock, 'Formation of the Australian Dictionary of Biography', box 69, Q31, ADDBA, ANUA.

11 Fitzhardinge interviewed by Ross (1987).

In the late 1940s, when Fitzhardinge was in charge of setting up a press at the University of Sydney, he thought that an Australian biographical dictionary project, based on the *DNB*, should head its list: 'I remember discussing it with Syd Butlin for instance, and there was general agreement in principle that this would be a good project for Sydney University Press'.¹² Sent on an apprenticeship to Oxford University Press in 1947, he spent an 'afternoon with the then editor of the current supplement to the *DNB* [talking] about methods of compiling and problems'.¹³

Following his appointment as reader in sources of Australian history in the RSSS, in 1951, Fitzhardinge convened a small committee to consider the possibility and desirability of an ANU press, again hoping to make a dictionary of Australian biography a flagship publication. The scientists, however, 'wouldn't have a bar of it': Ernest Titterton declared that scientists had no interest in contributing resources to a press, for they published in journals. Fitzhardinge then discussed the possibility of commissioning authors to write *DNB*-style articles, which might be circulated 'in monograph form, like the Law Book publications, in a loose-leaf thing which eventually would be the *ADB* and would then be made up and printed as volumes'. In the meantime, he employed a series of research assistants to work on a card index. The card index later became the Biographical Register, 'building up material' for a biographical dictionary. And he talked enthusiastically about a dictionary to anyone who would listen.

In his turn, Fitzhardinge was clear that the *ADB* project, as it developed, was without doubt, 'Hancock's baby' and that he (Fitzhardinge) could never have assembled the widespread academic support necessary to launch the project. From time to time, Hancock discussed how the idea for a biographical dictionary grew on him from his involvement with the *DNB* in wartime Britain and, in particular, when he started to work on a biography of the prominent South African and British Commonwealth statesman Jan Smuts, and 'found good cause to curse the lack of a South African *DNB*'. The four volumes of Smuts' papers involved hundreds of references to individuals; Hancock found himself duty-bound as a good editor 'to track down these individuals and write brief notes about them'. 'If a Dictionary had existed', he noted, 'I should have been saved two years more of finicky work'.¹⁴

In October 1947 Max Crawford had suggested to Hancock that the ANU produce an 'Australian Dictionary of National Biography'. As part of the planning of the ANU in the immediate postwar period, Hancock, who had been invited by the ANU Council to advise it about the establishment of a school of social sciences, invited leading economist Syd Butlin, political scientist Perc Partridge,

12 Fitzhardinge interviewed by Ross (1987).

13 Fitzhardinge interviewed by Ross (1987).

14 W. K. H. [Hancock], 'The ADB' (12 April 1962), box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

legal academic George Paton, psychologist Bill O'Neill, social studies researcher James Cardno and historian Crawford to prepare overview papers on their respective disciplines and their prospects at the ANU. He asked them to consider '[w]hat facilities are necessary for the encouragement of research in your field in Australia'. Presciently, Crawford suggested:

There is I believe more work being done now on Australian biography, a field in which we have in the past done relatively little. I do not need to labour the point that biographical studies will teach us about much more than the persons studied. This is work for individual scholars. The role of the National University might be the eventual production of an Australian Dictionary of National Biography.¹⁵

Whatever its genesis, by the late 1950s, the dictionary idea was being publicly attributed to Hancock. When he took up his position as professor of history and director of RSSS in 1957, he also took up the dictionary as an important flagship of his professional leadership.

Without any major source of funding, but with the cooperation of historians from all the universities and a belief that authors would willingly write entries, based on original research and without payment, the provisional editorial committee, of what was then called the Dictionary of Australian Biography, met for the first time in Hancock's office in the old Canberra Community Hospital in June 1959. The committee consisted of Hancock (as chair), Manning Clark, Professor of History in the neighbouring Canberra University College; Jim Davidson, Professor of Pacific History in the Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPS); Robin Gollan, Research Fellow in RSSS; Laurie Fitzhardinge; and Ann Mozley, who had been employed by Hancock in 1958 specifically to work on the dictionary. They defined their objective as the publication of a multi-volume dictionary within 10 years, and set up two working parties to act as pilots for the organisation of the first two volumes on the period of the naval governors, 1788–1809, and a Pacific history group.

Hancock had written to leading historians in Australian universities and outside, inviting them to be involved in the project. He had brought them together to confer and then to join a national committee. Hancock then sent Mozley around the country to proselytise the idea and to encourage the formation of working parties in the States. Travelling to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Hobart in August and September 1959, she reported that there was general agreement 'that now was the time to begin'.¹⁶

15 Professor R. M. Crawford, 'History' (10 October 1947), in W. K. Hancock (ed.), *Research in the Social Sciences in Australia. Reports Prepared at the Request of Professor Keith Hancock, January 1948* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1948), p. 3.

16 Ann Mozley, 'Report on My Journey to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Hobart, August–Sept 1959', box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA [reprinted here].

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ANU historian Robin Gollan was a member of the *ADB*'s Editorial Board from 1960 until 1981, and was acting chairman in 1973

ANU Archives, 225-459, 1975

Hancock emphasised to the ANU Council members in 1962 that, while the Australian dictionary was part of a world family of such projects, and that a dictionary project in Australia was overdue, the *ADB* was developing in exceptional ways too. It was different from other dictionary projects in the way it was to be funded, designed, operated and managed. The *DNB*, the *Dictionary*

of *American Biography* (*DAB*) and the *Canadian Dictionary of Biography* (*CDB*) were the direct results of substantial private endowments. In 1959 the New Zealand Government had directly funded an encyclopedia project—which had a Biography Advisory Committee and would contain a large number of biographies.¹⁷

Hancock regarded the comparison between the *CDB* and the *ADB* to be the closest: 'Our definitions of the objective and the method of achieving it are, in many respects, very similar'. They were both twentieth-century endeavours, founded in 1959, and situated in universities. But, while the *CDB* was developed out of the Canadian Biographical Centre at the University of Toronto, the Canadians also 'took the precaution of discovering a benevolent millionaire', who died and left a large legacy to establish their project. Hancock assured the ANU vice-chancellor that 'I think it unlikely that I shall need to look for a millionaire. I believe that we can do this work at least as well as the Canadians and far more economically'.¹⁸

Making a virtue out of necessity, the *ADB* had been launched in the belief that cooperative scholarship and interest could compensate for the lack of large-scale funds if financial responsibility for editing the publication was accepted by the ANU; Melbourne University Press (MUP) agreed to bear the burden of publication. Hancock noted that the *ADB* was ahead of the Canadians in the race to produce a dictionary because it had access to Fitzhardinge's Biographical Register. Australia was following 'British precedents fairly closely but, of course, after the lapse of more than half a century, we should be able to do better than the British did. I have no doubt', he told the council, 'we shall do'.¹⁹

Finally, Hancock reminded the 1962 gathering that the ANU was founded in 1946 with a specific nation-building charter to encourage, and provide facilities for, research and postgraduate study, both generally and in relation to subjects of national importance to Australia.²⁰ He saw an ANU-led national history project as an important realisation of the ANU's charter. He also repeated to the council the remark of Queensland colleague Gordon Greenwood that '[w]e will do nothing for the ANU; but with the ANU there are no limits to what we are willing to do'. Hancock emphasised the absolute necessity that the partners

17 The New Zealand Cabinet decided in late 1959 to produce an encyclopedia of New Zealand, which included 900 biographies of up to 3000 words. A publication committee was set up, with the parliamentary historian as editor; two editorial staff were appointed; two preliminary advisory committees, one of which was concerned with biography, were established and contributors engaged. It resulted in A. H. McLintock (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 3 vols (Wellington: Government Printer, 1966), box 73, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

18 W. K. Hancock to Sir Leslie Melville (22 July 1959), box 70, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

19 W. K. Hancock to Sir Leslie Melville (22 July 1959), box 70, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

20 Hon. J. J. Dedman MP, Minister for Post-War Reconstruction, 'Second Reading Speech—Australian National University Bill 1946', *Hansard* (19 June 1946).

in this significant national historical enterprise should feel that they were not merely instruments of ANU policies and ambitions but that 'their partnership with us, in this national enterprise, is a real one'.²¹

Hancock won the council's approval, and recurrent funding was made available for the *ADB*.²² Research staff were appointed, lists of subjects were completed, authors commissioned and a schedule for publication drawn up. It was a significant turning point in the project's history.

A decentralised collaborative design: The *ADB*'s exceptionalism

This collection is the first sustained account of the history of the *ADB*. The prefatory pages of the *ADB*'s published volumes, unlike other national biographical dictionary projects, say little about its own history. Those who founded other major national dictionary projects wrote memoirs and/or were themselves the subjects of biographies;²³ in some cases they wrote about their philosophy of biography.²⁴ The histories of a number of dictionary projects have been analysed,²⁵ with debates over their design and legacies. Ann Moyal has observed that the lack of a historical account is an interesting and telling omission; the *ADB* 'appears to be "a Dictionary without a history"', and 'stands out as one of the few great biographical ventures that offers no introductory account of the founding impulse, or of those who set it on its route'.²⁶ Only a couple of the historians involved in the *ADB* have written memoirs: Hancock,

21 W. K. Hancock, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography', presentation to the ANU Council on 12 April 1962, box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA, p. 6.

22 Minutes, *ADB* Editorial Board meeting (7–8 June 1963). While the salaries of all full-time staff at the *ADB* were being paid by the history department, Hancock made provision for the dictionary's autonomy and 'symbolise[d] it by giving the Dictionary a budget of its own' within his history department budget when Pike shifted to Canberra.

23 Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen. The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984). H. G. C. Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Brian Harrison, 'A Slice of Their Lives. Editing the DNB, 1882–1999', *English Historical Review*, 119, no. 484 (2004), pp. 1179–201.

24 Leslie Stephen, 'National Biography', in Sir Leslie Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer*, vol. 1 (London: Duckworth, 1929) (FP 1898), pp. 1–36. Sidney Lee, *Principles of Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911). Allen Johnson, *The Historian and Historical Evidence* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1926).

25 Keith Thomas, *Changing Conceptions of National Biography. The Oxford DNB in Historical Perspective, The Leslie Stephen Special Lecture, 2004* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); see footnotes for references to a wide literature.

26 W. K. Hancock, *Professing History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976). Ann Moyal, *Breakfast with Beaverbrook. Memoirs of an Independent Woman* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995), p. 137.

the first chair of the Editorial Board (1959–66); and Mozley (later Moyal), the ADB's first staff member (1958–62).²⁷ Both passed over the history of the ADB 'lightly' because it was really a minor event in their long careers.

Nevertheless, there are some early accounts of the ADB's history.²⁸ A biography of Hancock, two full biographies of Manning Clark, one of the two inaugural volume editors, and a number of reconsiderations of Clark's life and work have recently been published.²⁹ And there have been accounts of those who had long careers with the ADB: a thesis on Douglas Pike, the first general editor, and another on Geoffrey Serle, the third general editor, subsequently published as a book.³⁰ A conference on 'National Biographies and National Identities', which showcased the ADB, was held in Canberra in 1995.³¹ A number of papers considering the dictionary's history have also begun to appear.³² Peter Ryan, the director of the ADB's publisher, Melbourne University Press, from 1962 to 1988, has written fondly of the ADB in his memoirs.³³

This story of the ADB is in keeping with a more general historiographical tendency by, and of, historians.³⁴ Australian historians have become more self-reflective and interested in the sociology of knowledge.³⁵ There has been a wave of interest in historians and editors as authors and 'makers' of history, whose backgrounds and ideas are integral to understanding the history that was

27 Ann Mozley, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 9, no. 35 (1960), pp. 313–14.

28 Pike published a few ephemeral pieces: Douglas Pike, 'Historical Biography and Australian Libraries', *Papers Library Association of Australia, 13th Biennial Conference*, 2 (1965), pp. 489–92; 'The Commemorative Business', *Scholarly Publishing*, 1, no. 4 (1970), pp. 331–4; 'The Making of a Biographical Dictionary', *Papers and Proceedings* [Tasmanian Historical Research Association], 19, no. 4 (1972), pp. 139–46; 'Making a Biographical Dictionary', in David Dufty, Grant Harman and Keith Swan (eds), *Historians at Work: Investigating and Recreating the Past* (Sydney: Hicks Smith & Sons, 1973), pp. 103–9.

29 Jim Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life: The Historian W. K. Hancock* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010). Stephen Holt, *A Short History of Manning Clark* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999). Brian Matthews, *Manning Clark: A Life* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2008). Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2011).

30 John Thompson, 'Geoffrey Serle and His World: The Making of an Australian Historian' (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2004); and *The Patrician and the Bloke: Geoffrey Serle and the Making of Australian History* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006). John David Calvert, 'Douglas Pike (1908–1974): South Australian and Australian Historian' (MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008).

31 'National Biographies and National Identity: A Critical Approach to Theory and Editorial Practice', an International Conference sponsored by the Humanities Research Centre, the Australian Dictionary of Biography (Australian National University), and the National Library of Australia, 1–3 February 1995, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Iain McCalman (ed.), *National Biographies and National Identity. A Critical Approach to Theory and Editorial Practice* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1996).

32 See Gerald Walsh, 'Recording "the Australian Experience": Hancock and the Australian Dictionary of Biography', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Keith Hancock: The Legacies of an Historian* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 249–68.

33 Peter Ryan, *Final Proof: Memoirs of a Publisher* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), pp. 43–50. Earlier, he also published 'The ADB', *Quadrant* (June 2000), pp. 87–8.

34 Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

35 G. Davison, J. Hirst and S. Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998). This includes a number of entries on the ADB and its staff.

written. More widely, biography has been resurrected in academic history, after social and Marxist history initially downplayed individuals, with some positing a 'biographical turn'.³⁶ The 'biography' of Australian historical institutions is also gaining attention.³⁷

There is, however, a degree of difficulty involved in writing the *ADB's* story because its beginnings were not happy. Moyal has argued that those involved in the early years wished to 'draw a veil' over the arguments between Hancock, Clark, John Ward, the chair of the NSW Working Party, and Malcolm Ellis in the early years—to the point of destroying records. Ellis, who, with Clark, was chosen to edit the *ADB's* first two volumes, had attacked Clark publicly as a 'crypto-communist' and promoter of biographies 'without facts'.³⁸ By all other accounts, Ellis, who was difficult to work with, nearly brought down the infant dictionary project. Certainly Hancock destroyed at least one of Ellis's infamous resignation letters and expunged the minutes of a small episode of the dispute.³⁹ But he recorded the missing incidences in other documents. While aspects of the formation of the *ADB* were a painful personal memory for Hancock, who wrote in 1962, 'for the present I have no interest in the historical record', he also noted that the 'documents have been kept, and some historian 30 years from now may have a go at them. Good luck to him'.⁴⁰ When, in 1968, Mozley complained to John La Nauze, then chair of the Editorial Board, that in the preface to Volume 1 her contribution to the *ADB* was not properly recognised (which he conceded) and did not include a history of the *ADB's* birth, La Nauze checked with Hancock, who responded that, while he had Ellis in mind and did not wish to antagonise him with his version of events, he also thought not enough time had passed to look at the origins of the *ADB* and its role dispassionately.⁴¹ For its part, the Editorial Board noted that the history of the project 'was planned for inclusion in a later Index Volume', although that never eventuated.⁴²

Rather than any orchestrated decision, then, writing the *ADB's* history just has not been a priority over the years. The archives, as Hancock indicated, are there.⁴³ Jim Davidson makes clear, too, in his biography of Hancock, that

36 Tom Wengraf, Prue Chamberlayne and Joanna Bornat (eds), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples* (London: Routledge, 2002).

37 Stephen Foster and Margaret Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University 1946–1996* (Canberra: ANU, 1996).

38 M. H. Ellis, 'Why I Have Resigned', *Bulletin* (15 June 1963), pp. 25–31; 'Disaster in Australian Research', *Bulletin* (26 March 1966), pp. 48–9; and 'Biography Soup', *Bulletin* (10 June 1967), p. 82.

39 Minutes, *ADB* Editorial Board meeting (6 February 1962), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

40 Sir Keith Hancock to Malcolm Ellis (June 1962), box 68, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

41 Letter, Ann Moyal to John La Nauze (28 May 1968); Letter, Hancock to La Nauze (11 December 1967), box 65, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

42 Minutes, *ADB* Editorial Board meeting (4 April 1968), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

43 Hancock, 'Formation of the Australian Dictionary of Biography', box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

Hancock finally 'accepted paternity' in 1986 when he launched Volume 10.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the 'foundational dispute' has cast a long shadow over the project, not only on its participants. Most publications about the ADB's early history, such as Gerry Walsh's account, concentrate upon the disagreements between Hancock, Ellis and Clark.⁴⁵ Andrew Moore has written four articles on aspects of the dispute and Ellis's pioneering role in modern Australian history, arguing that his anticommunism contributed to an early Australian 'history war'.⁴⁶ As is so often the case, dramatic conflicts overshadow more significant and long-lasting developments. The 'Ellis affair' needs to be considered but it also needs to be put in its place. Other questions need to be asked of Hancock, Ellis and Clark, and all those associated with the ADB. What, for instance, was the foundational culture they collectively established?

Moyal records in Chapter 2 that Hancock had called a national conference in August 1957 to gauge the state of Australian history and to begin a conversation among Australian historians. Calling, and partly funding, this four-day conference of university historians (and others involved in researching Australian history) from across the nation was one of Hancock's first acts when he returned from England to take up the inaugural chair of history and directorship of RSSS. As a distinguished Australian historian and biographer, Ellis was invited, along with other non-university historians Brian Fitzpatrick, Archbishop Eris O'Brien and Gavin Long, to discuss how to 'advance the study of Australian history'.⁴⁷ Ellis was one of the few historians of any hue who had published several well-received biographies: on John Macarthur, Lachlan Macquarie and Francis Greenway. He was one of the few historians who thought about biography. Most Australian biographies, Ellis wrote in 1955, were like 'licking the cold outside of a champagne bottle on a thirsty day'.⁴⁸ Hancock was attracted to someone who stressed the facts of a life but also insisted on 'familiarity with the age in which

44 Keith Hancock, 'Speech Notes for the Launch of Volume 10 of the ADB' (1986), box 116, Q31, ADBA, ANUA. [reprinted here as Document 3]

45 Walsh, 'Recording "the Australian Experience"', pp. 249–68.

46 Andrew Moore, "'History without facts': M. H. Ellis, Manning Clark and the Origins of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 85, no. 2 (1999), pp. 71–84; "'The Historical Expert': M. H. Ellis and the History of the Cold War", *Australian Historical Studies*, 31, no. 114 (2000), pp. 91–109; 'The "Great-Literary Witch Hunt" Revisited: Politics, Personality and Pique at the CLF, 1952', *Labour History* (May 2002); 'From the Strand to Boorooloola: M. H. Ellis as Pioneer Motorist', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 81 (2004), pp. 83–92.

47 Robin Gollan, 'Canberra History Conference', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 8, no. 29 (1957), p. 81.

48 M. Ellis, 'The Writing of Australian Biographies', *Historical Studies*, 6, no. 24 (1955), based on his Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) paper, Canberra, 1954, p. 432.

your victim lived; with its conventions, with its mode of thinking, with the limitations of its thought, with the stage of its civilisation with its sumptuary conditions and with its social climate'.⁴⁹

At this landmark conference, Australian historians took stock of their profession, assessing its state and plumbing the depths (or shallows) of the 'soul of Australian history'. They concentrated on four fields: biography, church history, labour history and economic history; there were also sessions on the teaching of Australian history and the state of archives. This last session was characteristic of Hancock, especially influenced by his experience with archives when writing the biography of Smuts. The conference unanimously agreed that 'one of the badly needed aids to historical research ... [was] a Concise Dictionary of Australian Biography', and acknowledged the start that had been made towards this goal with Fitzhardinge's Biographical Register.⁵⁰ It was also agreed that any dictionary project would be a long-term one needing the cooperation of the ANU, State universities and the general public. Gollan, who wrote an account of the conference, regarded the meeting 'as an index of the growing maturity of Australian history studies', but also observed that 'very few decisions were reached' about actually starting a biographical dictionary.⁵¹

It was left to Hancock and Ellis to take up the mantle. While Hancock continued to correspond with historians about the shape and governance of the project, Ellis, with characteristic energy, drew up an organisational plan involving the establishment of a unit based at the ANU to which a managing editor and some research editors would be appointed. There would also be

1. an inclusive 'National Committee' (National Advisory Panel) consisting of representatives from every university
2. a small executive Editorial Board to determine the broad lines of strategy and procedural, budget, staffing and publication matters
3. a working party system established through the States and Territories, which would draw up lists of subjects for inclusion and suggest authors for the articles.

49 Ellis, 'The Writing of Australian Biographies', pp. 432–46. James J. Auchmuty, 'The Background of Australian History', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 41, no. 3 (1955), p. 139; see also 'The Biographical Approach to History', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 46, no. 2 (1960), pp. 97–111.

50 'Excerpt from Statement prepared by Professor Hancock. Formation of the Australian Dictionary of Biography', box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

51 Robin Gollan, 'Canberra History Conference', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 8, no. 29 (1957), pp. 80–92.

The ADB's Story

Malcolm Ellis's suggested organisational plan for the *ADB*, 1959. He proposed an Australasian Dictionary of Biography that would include New Zealand and Pacific working parties

ADB archives

While this part of Ellis's structure was almost completely realised, a major difference erupted between Ellis and Hancock on the question of centralisation. Hancock distinguished between two approaches to a big academic venture: the organisational method, with a strong central committee (Ellis's preference); and the growth method (Hancock's preference).⁵² Ellis's proposal was first to

1. set up a directorate of 'tycoons' (political, commercial, industrial, academic leaders) under the chairmanship of the chief justice or someone similar to guide and promote the project
2. obtain money from the government and private benefactors to finance the project
3. establish an office under a managing director, editor or administrator, with ample academic, administrative, secretarial and typing assistance
4. publicise the enterprise
5. draw up lists of subjects
6. commission authors and pay them well
7. and then, expeditiously, send the dictionary to press.⁵³

Provided there is plenty of money, Hancock said, 'the organisational method ... excludes any possibility of failure'. On the other hand, success may come too easily because there had been 'so little struggle' and, in the long run, little collaboration. Hancock's major objection was that 'the danger of the organisational method is—to use old fashioned language—that it may give you "a body without a soul"'.⁵⁴

There were also differences over principle. Hancock's growth model had, as its features, decentralisation and national cooperation. He took care to avoid 'a Canberra stamp or even the appearance of one; the Dictionary had to avoid being "a Canberra racket with an all-Australian façade"'. From the outset, he 'sought advice and approval from colleagues in the state universities' and beyond for a 'consultative constitution', which he later referred to as a 'co-operative federalism'.⁵⁵

Hancock's strategy was both practical and political. As Geoffrey Bolton has suggested, until relatively recently, Australian history was best comprehended as six regional histories rather than a simply national one.⁵⁶ Hancock's model

52 Walsh makes this point, too, quoting from Hancock's view on design from Hancock's 'The Dictionary; Retrospect and Prospect' (18 June 1963), box 68, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

53 Walsh, 'Recording "the Australian Experience"', pp. 249–68.

54 Hancock, 'The Dictionary; Retrospect and Prospect' (18 June 1963), box 68, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

55 Hancock, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography'; Hancock, 'Speech Notes for the Launch of Volume 10 of the ADB' (1986), box 116, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

56 G. Bolton to J. Calvert (11 May 2002), privately held, cited by Calvert, 'Douglas Pike (1908–1974)'.

ensured that committees consisted of, as well as academics, librarians, archivists and members of historical societies, among others. A complex system of State and thematic working parties spoke not only to the federal nature of Australian historiography, but also to the logic of doing research in the 1960s.

Hancock's view prevailed and the *ADB* evolved under a model of decentralisation and national cooperation. State-based working parties assumed the critical task of choosing subjects and authors for entries. While it was agreed that the 'final decision on all lists will rest with the Editors', in fact the general editor has rarely vetoed or changed lists.

The decision about working party autonomy was made at a meeting of the Editorial Board in April 1960. It was agreed that the dictionary should reflect the federal and national character in its presentation, and 'give a representative picture of all strands of Australian life, observing the varying interests from state to state'.⁵⁷ The meeting also accepted that 'there can be no blueprint for Working Party organisation; each state will face different problems and will seek individual solutions'. Working parties were established in each State (in the early stages New South Wales had three working parties, based in Sydney, Newcastle and Armidale). An armed services working group developed into a working party in 1974, a Commonwealth working group became a working party in 1989 and the Indigenous Working Party was formed in 2005. From the 1970s, working party quotas were based on demographic proportions.

Hancock was aware that this decentralised 'ad-hoc' or 'growth' method had some dangers. One was that funding of the project was dependent upon continuing university support. While other national dictionary projects, based in universities, have received substantial endowments and grants, the *ADB* has relied almost solely on funding from the ANU, facilitated by block grants from the Commonwealth Government. The project has been sustained over the past 50 years but it has not had the infusion of large grants that have enabled other dictionary projects to revise their earliest entries or add new features. And it has never had the funding to pay authors.⁵⁸

The second hazard was that Hancock's method required 'lots of discussion'—a 'universal law of editorship in the academic world'. Bill Williams, a friend of Hancock, had indulged in the 'time-consuming but rewarding processes of academic consultation, which are required in any great venture of co-operative scholarship', when he edited the decadal volumes (1951–60) of the *DNB*.⁵⁹

57 A. Mozley, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 9, no. 35 (1960), pp. 313–14.

58 Minutes, *ADB* Editorial Board meeting (18 August 1988), box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

59 'Personal Notes for Concluding Speech by W. K. H. (December 1961)', box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

Hancock, as editor of the 28 volumes of the British *Civil Histories of the War* and member of the Editorial Board of the *Economic History Review*, swore by this method too. Ellis, however, had not been inducted into this academic culture. He was also adamant that the project needed powerful backers and a large injection of capital. Gollan suggested that, in retrospect, Hancock thought 'probably correctly, that he had started too small';⁶⁰ but he never regretted that the *ADB* was, as he described it to Mozley in a letter in 1964, 'insufficiently engineered'.⁶¹ We will return to this point—that the *ADB* is less directed in its shape than other dictionary projects. Its position in a national university, its national collaborative structure and its recurrent university funding continue to distinguish the *ADB* from other national dictionary projects.

Is insufficient design ideal?

The *ADB* has been based on autonomous working parties that have never had precise criteria for selecting the people to be included. The *ADB* avoided the subject of national identity directly, deciding in 1960 that it was not possible to lay down rigid categories for inclusion and selection. It was expected that the criteria would evolve organically. 'Some offices and ranks may qualify for automatic inclusion e.g. Governors (up to responsible government), Governors-General, Colonial Secretaries, Federal and State Cabinet Ministers, Chief Justices, Archbishops and their nonconformist equivalents, Generals, Admirals, etc'. Working parties were also told to provide a 'representative picture of all strands of Australian life, politics, religion, the professions, business, commerce, the arts, the services, sport, science, education, entertainment, and, on the precedent of the D.N.B., the historic villain will not be neglected'.⁶² There was also a discussion about what constitutes an Australian: birth, education, residence of five years, impact on society? This has never been resolved.⁶³

Subjects in the *ADB* have not been selected on any criteria to do with Australian character. Richard White, in *Inventing Australia*, critically deconstructs attempts to capture Australia's 'essence' or national identity. He looks at all the attempts, beginning before settlement (when Europeans 'dreamed' of *terra incognita*), and argues that it and all subsequent images are inventions. White describes Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) as the 'last great re-statement of

60 Robin Gollan, 'Sir (William) Keith Hancock 1898–1988', *Proceedings of the Australian Academy of Humanities*, 14 (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1990), p. 63.

61 Moyal, *Breakfast with Beaverbrook*, p. 148, citing Hancock to Moyal (June 1964).

62 'Draft Directions for Working Parties, Working Party Procedures' (n.d., c. 1960), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

63 'Notes for Seminar' (n.d. [1975]), 'Geoff Serle Correspondence', box 132, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

the character of Australian type' or identity.⁶⁴ Ward was a section editor, from the mid 1960s to 1976, for Volumes 3–6 of the *ADB* but did not impose radical national criteria for subject selection.

Nor did other authors of 'radical nationalism histories', such as Gollan and Bede Nairn, who have also been involved in the *ADB* (Nairn as the *ADB*'s second general editor).⁶⁵ None of them imposed their view of Australian identity on the selection of articles for the *ADB* nor did they manage to manipulate working party subject proportions. As a consequence, the dictionary has survived the test of time, providing material for others to construct their own images of the 'real' Australia or the 'typical Australian' that have, inevitably, become dated and have been disputed over time. Mark McGinness shows in his review of the reviews of the *ADB* in Chapter 10 that there has been bias in the selections but the range of subjects has been sufficiently broad to support the fracturing, questioning and redefining of any dominant story. Until recently, most *ADB* reviewers have praised its very lack of design, the 'thousands of little biographies [that] are undefiled by dogmas, theory or interpretation'.⁶⁶

The *ADB* has prided itself on the inclusion of representative people: since 1966, prefaces to volumes have noted that 'many of the names were obviously significant and worthy of inclusion. Others, less notable, were chosen simply as samples of the "Australian experience"'.⁶⁷ Representatives 'of ethnic and social minorities and of a wider range of occupations, or as innovators, notorieties or eccentrics' have been included.⁶⁸ Thus, earlier volumes contain, for instance, a representative shearer, a drover, a rabbiter, a barmaid and a landlady.

In 1996, Chris Cunneen, the *ADB*'s deputy general editor, observed that consideration in selecting entries had been given to subjects

most likely to be looked for in the future ... despite this concentration on the famous, a great number of those who would not normally be considered as belonging to the elite are also included. State committees are constantly searching not only for important figures to include but also for representative, ordinary people.⁶⁹

64 Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

65 Melanie Nolan, 'Entwined Associations: Labour History and its People in Canberra', in Melanie Nolan (ed.), *Labour History and its People, Twelfth Biennial National Labour History Conference* (Canberra: Canberra Region Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History [hereinafter ASSLH] and the National Centre of Biography [hereinafter NCB], ANU, 2011), pp. 1–15.

66 Peter Read, *Quadrant* (June 1980), p. 88.

67 Douglas Pike, 'Preface', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 1 (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1966), p. v.

68 'Preface', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10 (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983).

69 Chris Cunneen, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography: Creating History (or No Room for "Rosebuds"?), a paper to the Documenting A Life Seminar, 26 October 1996, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Hancock, launching Volume 10 of the *ADB* in 1986, judged that the *ADB* was an improvement over the *DNB* because of its more adventurous inclusion of people 'widely representative of endeavour and achievement on every front of our experience as an emergent nation'. Where else could one find between one set of covers a scholarly essay on Sir John Monash and a rollicking account of the adventures of Herbert Dyce Murphy, who travelled the French railways as a spy in the guise of a woman?⁷⁰

The most common criticism of the *ADB* has nevertheless been about representation. There are any number of questions to be asked of biography—about the role of the individual in history and individual human agency as opposed to social structure. What details are appropriate to be included? Is it possible to know the inner life of another? Should that be the goal of concise biography? Is biography an art? These are questions that Samuel Johnson asked, in the eighteenth century, in his two essays on biography.⁷¹ Some of these questions have been broached in discussions about particular *ADB* articles. Should there have been a biography of Azaria Chamberlain, a baby who lived only for a few weeks? Should the *ADB* have more explicitly discussed Dame Nellie Melba's facelift as the cause of her death from septicemia? Was James Griffin's entry on Daniel Mannix fair in describing the archbishop as politically naive, intellectually shallow, hardly an educationalist and not well versed in socioeconomic matters?⁷² These particular 'controversies' pale into insignificance, however, in the face of the main question: 'Who deserves to have a biography written of them?'

The *ADB* is hardly representative. It has been estimated that nine million Australians died between 1788 and 1990.⁷³ Given that 12 500 dictionary entries cover this period, any single person has 0.1 per cent chance of 'getting into' the *ADB*. Since the mid 1970s, with the growth in popularity of women's history and social history, there has been increasing criticism of 'group omissions': women, Aborigines, and the working class. There have also been criticisms that certain groups are 'over-represented': the elite, the military and people from New South Wales. At the Editorial Board meeting in 1975, as quotas were being decided for volumes covering the period 1891–1939, there was extended debate

70 Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS), *Annual Report* (2007). See also Diane Langmore to Sydney Institute (13 November 2007), published as 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography: A National Asset', *Sydney Papers*, 20, no. 1 (Summer 2008), pp. 22–30. Herbert Dyce Murphy was also a member of Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition, a fact that makes his appearance in the volume seem less eccentric perhaps.

71 Ray Monk, 'Life without Theory: Biography as Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', *Poetics Today*, 28, no. 3 (2007), pp. 259–60.

72 Tim O'Leary, 'Daniel Mannix; The Dictionary of Biography's Hatchet Job', *AD2000: A Journal of Religious Opinion* (April 1989). James Griffin, 'Reality or Revisionism: Daniel Mannix and the Australian Dictionary of Biography', *Tirra Lira*, 6, no. 1 (1995), pp. 18–23.

73 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics: Deaths* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Wray Vamplew (ed.), *Australians, Historical Statistics* (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), p. 59.

about representation. It was decided that weighted population figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census were to be regarded as 'a guide'. The main criterion was to be 'the importance of the name in Australian history', while also taking into account the 'relative development of each State'.⁷⁴ There was much discussion when the relative proportions were tabled (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Number and Proportion of Entries in Period 3 (1891–1939) Allocated to Each Working Party

State or theme	Quota of articles	Proportion of total
New South Wales	1060	27
Victoria	960	24
Queensland	360	9
South Australia	330	8
Western Australia	210	5
Tasmania	125	3
New Guinea	40	1
Commonwealth	320	8
Armed Services	560	14
Miscellaneous	40	1

Source: Minutes, ADB Editorial Board meeting (29 October 1975), box 66, Q31, ADDBA, ANUA.

Above all, the proportion of armed services entries was questioned. Bob O'Neill, convenor of the Armed Services Working Party, justified the 560 entries allotted to his working party on the basis of the importance of World War I. The involvement of 300 000 Australians in the services in that war was nationally significant. He noted that the armed services subjects came from all States and the intention was to include a good sample of the experience arising from war, in various ranks and occupations.⁷⁵ In 1986, Editorial Board member Ann Curthoys more explicitly criticised the extent of military articles in the ADB.⁷⁶ Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds and others have developed this criticism more expansively.⁷⁷

Most criticism has concerned the lack of inclusion of Aborigines and women, and the overprovision of the 'successful'. Reviewing Volume 1, Allan Martin praised the ADB but also referred to omissions, remarking that 'only fifteen of the entries refer to individuals born locally and five of these are aborigines', and

74 Paul Brunton, 'Mysterious Quotas', *Australian Book Review* (February 2006), pp. 19–20; and response by Di Langmore, *Australian Book Review* (May 2006), p. 4.

75 Minutes, ADB Editorial Board meeting (29 October 1975).

76 Ann Curthoys, Submission to the 1986 Review of the ADB, box 125, Q31, ADDBA, ANUA.

77 Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousi, *What's Wrong with Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).

signalled that although women hover in the background, 'barely half a dozen rate a mention in their own right'.⁷⁸ A decade later, Peter Ryan noted that the 'blurbs of the earliest volumes (despite the presence of articles about women) speak only of "he" and "him"'. Soon we find the awkward replacement of "he/she" and "him/her"'.⁷⁹

In 1975 the general editor of the *ADB*, Geoff Serle, contacted the feminist collective Refractory Girl and leading women historians for advice about women who could be included in the dictionary. He noted that, despite the best intentions, the proportion of entries on women was still 'rather disappointing'.⁸⁰ When Editorial Board member Heather Radi set out to compile a list of 200 Australian women for a bicentennial project—in a critical commentary on the paucity of women in the *ADB*, as well as in the bicentennial projects more generally—she found to her surprise that her first cut included 104 women who were in the *ADB*. She explained that was because 'achievement' had been part of the definition.⁸¹ Radi drew up a list of possible female inclusions for the volumes covering the period 1940–80, which John Ritchie, the fourth general editor, circulated to all working parties in 1989.

Even though the proportion of women had reached a record 20 per cent in Volume 14, the historian Pat Grimshaw was impatient for more progress. She noted in a paper in 1996 on 'Female Lives and the Tradition of Nation-Building' the centrality of the *ADB* in the Australian history profession and the 'production of a national history'. The project involved 'eminent historians ... while innumerable other respected scholars have contributed the biographical entries'. Despite this, she argued, a 'new Australian Dictionary of Biography was needed' that 'would have inclusiveness important for all Australians, rather than serving as a narrative of success and achievements for the victors'.⁸²

In 2004 Gordon Briscoe criticised the *ADB* for the paucity of entries on Aboriginal people and the limitations on contemporary biography imposed by the dictionary's periodisation by date of death. Subsequently, an Indigenous working party was established to promote their better representation. It was not a success and, like attempts to establish specialist medical and legal working parties, was soon abandoned.

78 A. W. Martin, *Historical Studies: Australia & New Zealand*, 12, no. 48 (1967), pp. 584–6.

79 Peter Ryan, 'The ADB', p. 88.

80 Minutes, *ADB* Editorial Board meeting (23 May 1985), box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

81 Heather Radi to Geoffrey Serle (20 May 1987), box 142, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

82 Pat Grimshaw, 'Female Lives and the Tradition of Nation-Making', in McCalman (ed.), *National Biographies and National Identities*, pp. 35–53.

Table 1.2 Representation of Women and Aboriginal Subjects in the *ADB*

Volume/period	Publication date	Total	Women	Percentage	Indigenous	Percentage
1 (1788–1850)	1966	575	10	1.74	4	0.7
2 (1788–1850)	1967	607	11	1.80	4	0.7
3 (1850–1890)	1969	526	14	2.66	1	0.2
4 (1850–1890)	1972	614	13	2.12	0	----
5 (1850–1890)	1974	533	12	2.25	2	0.4
6 (1850–1890)	1976	543	12	2.20	2	0.4
7 (1891–1939)	1979	723	81	11.20	0	----
8 (1891–1939)	1981	737	69	9.36	2	0.3
9 (1891–1939)	1983	742	73	9.84	5	0.7
10 (1891–1939)	1986	737	95	12.89	3	0.4
11 (1891–1939)	1988	759	94	12.38	5	0.7
12 (1891–1939)	1990	755	95	12.60	4	0.5
13 (1940–1980)	1993	721	138	19.14	14	1.9
14 (1940–1980)	1996	703	141	20.10	18	2.6
15 (1940–1980)	2000	714	129	18.07	19	2.7
16 (1940–1980)	2002	694	112	16.14	15	2.2
17 (1981–1990)	2007	670	115	17.16	15	2.2
18 (1981–1990)	2012	669	132	20.00	26	3.8
Av. proportion				10.65		1.13
Supplement	2005	565	167	29.56	50	8.9
Proportion including supplement volume			11.64		1.54	

Defenders of the *ADB* rightly note that it is becoming more representative. In 2005 four members of the current Editorial Board, Chris Cunneen, Jill Roe, Stephen Garton and Beverley Kingston, edited a special supplementary volume of ‘missing persons’, covering the period 1580 to 1980. This included nearly 30 per cent women and 9 per cent Aborigines. There was a feeling that, for the process to be sustained, the decisions had to be ‘mainstreamed’ rather than imposed from above.⁸³ Even then, in 2008, Paul Pickering, in a review of Volume 17, highlighted that ‘labour historians can but lament the silences and omissions in what is still basically an elite enterprise’.⁸⁴ There were many more knights than commoners in the *ADB*. One of the inadequacies—not picked up

⁸³ Christopher Cunneen with Jill Roe, Beverley Kingston and Stephen Garton (eds), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Supplement 1580–1980* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2005).

⁸⁴ P. A. Pickering, ‘Review of D. Langmore (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 17, 1981–1990, A–K*’, *Labour History*, no. 95 (November 2008), pp. 271–3.

by most of the reviewers—is that the Irish are under-represented in the *ADB*. The Scottish were prudent and valued education and it is not surprising that they are over-represented.⁸⁵

Those working closely with the *ADB* have accepted its organic development. In Chapter 9 Jill Roe points to an intriguing dilemma in the *ADB*'s design. She points to the relationship between the *ADB* and Australian historiography, the gradually widening range of subjects, but also the subtly changing treatment 'in accordance with changing mores'.⁸⁶ New impetuses and research have permitted the *ADB* to uncover a wider range of lives, in association with wider historiographical developments. Most importantly, Roe emphasises that data and information need to be available to the working parties during the selection process.

Because the *ADB* has never adopted explicit selection criteria, it has been able to adapt to change without ideological dilemmas. Which historians are involved in the *ADB* working parties and in making the decisions about selection is therefore critical; but the question remains: should a dictionary of national biography represent the general population or should it represent the movers and shakers?

The *ADB* system: Structure and agency

A further question in relation to the history of the *ADB* is begged by the way in which this volume is organised. In the first part it is organised around the 'eras' of the general editors. Pike edited the first five volumes; Nairn edited Volume 6 as sole editor and, with Serle, co-edited volumes 7–10; Serle was sole editor for Volume 11; Ritchie edited volumes 12–15 and co-edited Volume 16 with Di Langmore, who then edited Volume 17 and part of Volume 18. If, however, as it has been argued, the working parties have been largely autonomous, with minimal interference over who is to be included and who is to write the entries, have the general editors made any impact? Can one tell the difference between their eras? As Chris Cunneen muses in Chapter 4, 'now that all the entries are wonderfully available in one alphabetical sequence online' the volumes seem superfluous. Given this digital soup, how important are the general editors in the scheme of things?

The *ADB* has progressively developed a style manual, a tight template, and a rigorous editing process for entries.⁸⁷ The various section editors are the first to

85 Melanie Nolan, 'Scots in the Australian Dictionary of Biography', *History Scotland*, 9, no. 4 (July–August 2009), pp. 49–53.

86 Jill Roe, 'Biography Today: A Commentary', *Australian Historical Studies*, 43, no. 1 (April 2012), pp. 107–18.

87 *ADB Style Manual*. For earlier versions, see boxes 44 and 138, Q31, AD BA, ANUA.

review the entries, which are then handed to desk editors who check them for factual accuracy (where possible) and edit the entry to conform with the 'ADB style'. The managing, or deputy, editor then reviews their work. The general editor reviews this process overall. The entries are also refereed by one or more of the ADB's external editorial fellows. Finally, authors consider and approve the edited piece. At their best, these articles attain the simple perfection of, as Bolton says, 'a haiku or a sonnet'.⁸⁸

Despite the many hands through which entries pass, most articles still require editorial work and styling from the general editor. According to Serle: 'The General Editor cannot delegate much. His final editing must be comprehensive. Apart from any special knowledge he may have, he has primary and ultimate responsibility for overall wordage, relative lengths of entries, quality of writing, style-consistency, negotiation with contributors over their entries, etc'.⁸⁹

And there have been complaints about editorial interference, most famously by Archibald Grenfell Price, who complained in correspondence with Pike in July 1964 that

over many years of publishing in Australia, Britain and America I have had dealings with a number of editors, including the editor of the *British Dictionary of Biography* but never before with one who completely rewrote a contribution, without any preliminary conversations, and then suggested that the unfortunate author should put his signature to other people's work.⁹⁰

Is the 'ADB style' larger than the general editors appointed to enforce it? Strategy, procedures, budgeting, staffing and publication decisions have been ways by which successive general editors have left their mark on the project. Ken Inglis, a former chair of the Editorial Board, observed that it was Hancock, the de facto first executive, who turned it from a 'set of cards and hopes into a great national achievement of collaborative scholarship'.⁹¹ We learn in Chapter 3 that it was Pike, whose hobby was to construct concrete and stone walls, who instituted the 'Spartan methods, heartlessly enforced' on ADB entries.⁹² Bede Nairn and Geoff Serle did not simply 'inherit the editorship' and house-sit it, as Fitzhardinge suggested: 'Pike had got the whole thing on wheels and running

88 Geoffrey Bolton, 'The Art of Australian Political Biography', in Tracey Arklay, John Nethercote and John Wanna (eds), *Australian Political Lives. Chronicling Political Careers and Administrative Histories* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006), p. 5. Bolton also discusses this in Chapter 5, in this volume.

89 Geoffrey Serle, 'General Editor's Workload', Submission to the ADB Review Committee (1986), box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

90 C. Kerr, *Archie: The Biography of Sir Archibald Grenfell Price* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983).

91 Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life*, p. 501. Ken Inglis, 'Obituary of Hancock', *Canberra Times and Age* [Melbourne] (15 August 1988).

92 1986 Review quoting Sir Sidney Lee of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

and it didn't take all that much—I mean it didn't take an organisational creative genius to keep it running'.⁹³ They were, as Serle would have it, 'managers of a huge cooperative'.⁹⁴ It was Nairn and Serle who oversaw the development of the *ADB* editorial team, instigated the system for obtaining birth, death and marriage records, and added cause of death for those under seventy years old as a feature of *ADB* entries. These were important developments, as was doubling of staff numbers. More resources meant more could be done and the whole scale of the *ADB* was increased: Volume 7 contained one-third more pages and one-quarter more entries than Volumes 3 to 6.⁹⁵

Ritchie had more resources than any other general editor for the first part of his editorship. In the late 1980s he oversaw the reinvigoration of the working parties and the Editorial Board as members of the foundation generation retired. During his reign the *floruit* principle was dropped. Until Volume 13 subjects were included in the period in which they had made their most important contribution to Australian affairs—*floruit*, not death, being the guide to their location. The criterion for inclusion in a particular period, under Ritchie, was date of death. This brought the *ADB* into line with most other dictionaries of biography, including the *DNB*, but it brought us perilously close to the present as his efficient work system churned out volumes every few years. Ritchie also started the *ADB* Endowment Fund (and managed to persuade the university to match any funds raised), oversaw the creation of the index of the *ADB* and the production of the *ADB* CD-ROM. He had little interest in what was then called the World Wide Web, however, and in 1992, when renewing the contract with MUP, gave them all publishing rights in this new media.

In 2006, under Di Langmore's editorship, the *ADB* went online, a development assisted by three Australian Research Council grants, and following protracted negotiations with MUP. The move not only greatly increased the *ADB*'s readership—the online version attracts more than 70 million hits a year—it also offered possibilities for presenting the entries in exciting new ways.⁹⁶

Instead of a seamless history, watersheds can be marked by general editors' 'eras'. A biographical approach is taken here and one might think it is appropriate, certainly understandable, that the *ADB* writes its own history in this way. We are all too aware in historiography that the writers are as important as the history that occurs, so it is in one sense fitting that in the first part these articles concentrate biographically upon the *ADB* general editors and the people involved in the institution. It is a convenient way of breaking up the 50 years and the individuals who have taken critical roles.

93 Fitzhardinge interviewed by Ross (1987).

94 Thompson, *The Patrician and the Bloke*, p. 249.

95 Serle, 'General Editor's Workload'.

96 Brendan O'Keefe, '11,000 Great Australian Lives Available at a Keystroke', *Australian* (12 July 2006), p. 32.

The *ADB's* sustained achievement and continuing legacy

The *ADB's* achievement has grown over half a century. Its impact was particularly important in the early period when there were few sources on Australian history. It has, indeed, been at the centre of the development of Australian history, as suggested by the circumstances surrounding the 1957 conference. The *ADB* has acted as a 'stimulus and support in the remarkable wave of research and writing' on Australian history that has occurred since the 1950s.⁹⁷ Subsequently, it has attracted most of Australia's leading historians to its ranks as authors and as members of the Editorial Board and working parties. This book's Appendix 3 records the names of members of the Editorial Board and the working parties, demonstrating the *ADB's* pervasive reach.

The *ADB* has, moreover, been widely consulted. The report of the 1986 review of the *ADB* included anecdotal evidence of professional historians, declaring that 'hardly a day goes by when I do not reach for it [the *ADB*]'.⁹⁸ In 1994, the then general editor, Ritchie, remarked that 'in terms of visibility, we have been reliably informed by librarians in major international institutions that the *A.D.B.* is their most frequently consulted source for information on Australians'.⁹⁹ The *Australian Encyclopedia* was the only other reference as frequently used.

The *ADB* has inspired work in a number of directions. The Biographical Register is perhaps the most significant. Begun by Fitzhardinge in 1954, it was maintained by the *ADB* until 2009 and consisted of biographical citations gleaned from newspapers, parliamentary debates, magazines and newsletters. The first—and eagerly anticipated—copy of the register, a 108-page roneoed booklet, was published in 1959. Updates were subsequently produced and, in 1987, a two-volume copy of the register was published.¹⁰⁰ By then the register had grown to include more than 300 000 index cards housed in 180 catalogue-card drawers. A few years earlier, staff had started entering new citations into an in-house database.

The biographical registers of members of the various parliaments were an offshoot of the Biographical Register.¹⁰¹ Allan Martin and Patience Wardle

97 1986 Review, box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA, p. 4.

98 1986 Review, box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

99 John Ritchie, 'Strategic Plan' (1994), box 149, Q31, ADBA, ANUA; see earlier 'Strategic Planning', box 126, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

100 H. J. Gibbney and Ann G. Smith (eds), *A Biographical Register 1788–1939: Notes from the Name Index of the Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1987).

101 A. W. Martin and P. Wardle, *Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1856–1901*, Forward by L. Fitzhardinge (Canberra: Australian National University Social Science Monograph No. 16, 1959). G. C. Bolton and Ann Mozley, *The Western Australian Legislature, 1870–1930* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1961), with Bolton's biography of Alexander Forrest being a major source. D. B.

published the first, a register of members of the NSW Legislative Assembly, in 1959. By 1961 it had been decided to produce a continuing series of registers for each State and for the federal legislatures, entitled 'Australian Parliaments: Biographical Notes'. Chris Connolly's *Biographical Register, NSW Parliament 1850–1901* (1983) was effectively the ninth and last in the series. It was a revised compilation of the first by Martin and Wardle and contained information on all the members of the Legislative Council. Like Martin's register, it had its genesis in the author's PhD thesis at the ANU.¹⁰² Connolly dedicated it to ADB staff whose scholarship he had 'come to admire', and who had provided certificates and other vital information.¹⁰³ The series of alphabetically arranged biographies, with collective biographical introductions, relating to the members of the Australian legislatures became, at the time, 'essential for research in Australian political history'.¹⁰⁴ Radi, Spearritt and Hinton wrote in their *Biographical Register of the NSW Parliament, 1901–1970*:

Reference aids in Australia are notoriously inadequate. Our libraries struggle to keep up with day-to-day demands on minuscule budgets and rarely get a chance to do anything else. Sustained biographical research has been left to the small but dedicated bands at the Australian Dictionary of Biography at ANU and to a handful of other scholars.¹⁰⁵

Since then there has been a trickle of collective accounts of ADB articles. Bernard Smith and others at the Power Institute undertook a *Biographical Dictionary of Artists and Architects* with which the ADB was involved. More directly, *The Makers of Australian Sporting Traditions* (1993, edited by Michael McKernan) and *The Diggers* (1993, edited by Chris Coulthard-Clark [now Clark]) were special editions of selected entries from the ADB.¹⁰⁶ They were envisaged

Waterson, *A Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament: 1860–1929* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972). Kathleen Thomson and Geoffrey Serle, *A Biographical Register of the Victorian Legislature 1859–1900* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972). Joan Rydon, *A Biographical Register of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1901–1972* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975). Heather Radi, Peter Spearritt and Elizabeth Hinton, *A Biographical Register of the NSW Parliament, 1901–1970* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979). Scott Bennett and Barbara Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851–1960* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980). D. B. Waterson and John Arnold, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1930–1980 with an Outline Atlas of Queensland Electorates 1859–1980* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982).

102 C. N. Connolly, *Biographical Register, NSW Parliament 1850–1901* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1983).

103 Material relating from certificates requested by Waterson, Rubenstein, Browne, Connolly, Langmore, Bolton, Radi, box 63, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.

104 Connolly, *Biographical Register*, p. ix.

105 Radi, Spearritt and Hinton, *A Biographical Register of the NSW Parliament, 1901–1970*, p. ix.

106 In 1993 MUP planned a series of spin-offs. Two appeared: Chris Coulthard-Clark (sel. and ed.), *The Diggers: Makers of the Australian Military Tradition—Lives from the Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1993); and Michael McKernan (sel. and ed.), *The Makers of Australia's Sporting Traditions: Lives from the Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1993). A third, 'Colonial Australians', edited by Deirdre Morris and Geoff Browne, did not

as the first of a 'proposed series of illustrated compilations from the *A.D.B.* on specialist subject areas designed to reach new readers and expose the *A.D.B.* to a wider audience', but the series never eventuated.¹⁰⁷

Historians have used the *ADB* systematically for research; for example, R. S. Neale attempted to measure whether social mobility in the colonies was responsible for taking some of the 'sting out of the nineteenth-century radical movement' by analysing the social origins and characteristics of executive and administrative leaders in Australia from 1788 to 1856 who had entries in the first three volumes of the *ADB*.¹⁰⁸ Gauging the importance of the *ADB* in Australian historiography more widely is difficult. In 1996, Ritchie claimed that the *ADB* had 'consolidated knowledge of the most important figures in Australian history and sharply etched in many who were shadowy or unknown'.¹⁰⁹ Certainly some historians have been inspired by writing an *ADB* entry to go on and write a great deal more. Jill Roe, an eminent historian and former chair of the *ADB* Editorial Board, has published two books that had their genesis as *ADB* entries. Her entry on theosophist George Arundel culminated in the publication of *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939* in 1986, while her Miles Franklin entry led to a number of edited books of Franklin's work as well as her award-winning full-scale biography of Franklin.¹¹⁰

The *ADB* is at a watershed as it moves from a book to a digital culture. Its future promises the possibilities of advanced indexing, network analysis, visualisations, inclusion of supporting resources and e-research. The *ADB* served a particularly important role when there was little in the way of authoritative published Australian history in the 1950s and 1960s. It is important again, in the twenty-first century, when there is so much information on the Internet. The *ADB* attracts attention due to its conciseness and the discipline of well-referenced, well-researched, concise biography that can lend itself to addressing big questions in Australian history such as the significance of kinship and family relations, and the associational life of Australians since 1788.

It is timely to record the history of the *ADB*. In 2008 the unit was amalgamated into the National Centre of Biography (NCB) at the ANU and in 2010 was integrated into the School of History. There has been a significant turnover of staff in the unit, and new directions, which take advantage of opportunities offered by the Internet, are being instigated. As already mentioned, the *ADB*'s

appear. Later and separately came G. P. Gilbert (ed.), *Australian Naval Personalities: Lives from the Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No. 17 (Canberra: Sea Power Centre—Australia, 2006).

107 RSSS, *Annual Report* (1993), box 137, Q31, ADAB, ANUA, p. 68.

108 'The Colonies and Social Mobility: Governors and Executive Councilors in Australia, 1788–1856', in R. S. Neale, *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 97–120.

109 John Ritchie, *RSSS Annual Report* (1996), NCB/ADB files, pp. 79–80.

110 Jill Roe, *Stella Miles Franklin. A Life* (Pymble, NSW: Fourth Estate, 2008).

long-established Biographical Register has been abandoned. In its place has emerged Obituaries Australia, an online, full-text database that is linked to relevant *ADB* entries. Further enhancements, and other databases, are being developed. The *ADB* remains, however, at their core.

This account of the *ADB* is built around the general editors; but in conclusion we return to Hancock's emphasis, with two other sections on the *ADB*'s perennial concerns: national collaboration and its relative and comparative position in the wider dictionary world.

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

Documents

Keith Hancock was the pivotal personality in the *ADB's* early history. His biographer, Jim Davidson (p. 393) observes that his 'self-effacement' over his role in the dictionary in the early years was "persistent". We have included these three documents to highlight his role.

Document 1

Keith Hancock kept ANU vice-chancellor, Sir Leslie Melville, appraised of dictionary plans from the outset. This report was presented to the ANU Council following the joint meeting of the *ADB* Editorial Committee and National Advisory Panel on 23-24 April 1960, which had made important decisions about organisational structure.

The Australian Dictionary of Biography

The idea of an Australian Dictionary of Biography has been entertained for some years; historians indicated approval at the Conference of Australian historians held in Canberra in 1957, and the work of building up a National Register has been carried on in the History Department of the A.N.U. since 1954.

In 1959, the Dictionary plan gathered momentum and a permanent member was appointed to the History Department to organise the project. At the same time, the support and interest of the State Universities and Libraries was sought for the plan, and a very real measure of co-operation obtained.

It was widely felt that this was a national task of great importance and that the Australian National University was the proper body to direct and organise it. It was also realised that much of the work would be produced in the State Universities and that it was essential for them to play a part in the making of policies and procedures.

An organisation for the Dictionary has now evolved which reflects the national character of the enterprise. The Dictionary is governed by a National Committee made up of representatives from each of the State Universities and the Editorial Board, and is under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Keith Hancock. The Editorial Board itself is the executive of the National Committee, composed predominantly of members of the Australian National University, and centered in Canberra. All editors are members of the Board.

Considerable progress has already been made through the Commonwealth, and Dictionary Working Parties have been organised in each State. These consist of specialists and experts in different fields giving their time voluntarily, proposing lists of names for inclusion in the Dictionary and lists of possible contributors,

and, in many cases, writing Dictionary articles. It is anticipated that the greater part of the work will be done on an unpaid basis, bringing in the knowledge of scholars, scientists, professional men, antiquaries, to make it a work of national scholarship.

Present plans for the Dictionary envisage that approximately 9–10 volumes will be published in the next decade. The Dictionary will be published in chronological volumes, the first covering the period 1788–1825; the second 1825–56, and so on. Professor Manning Clark and Mr. M. H. Ellis have been appointed joint editors of the first two volumes. It is expected that work will be started concurrently on the post 1850 volumes, and editors appointed in the near future.

Publishing arrangements will be undertaken by the Melbourne University Press who have expressed their confidence in offering to publish without a subsidy.

It is Professor Hancock's belief that the Dictionary will be produced without substantial endowments, unlike the Canadian counterpart now being started on a bequest of one million dollars. The History Department of the Australian National University has nonetheless committed itself to an organisational task of considerable magnitude.

10 May 1960

W. K. Hancock, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography' (10 May 1960), Minutes, ANU Council meeting (13 May 1960), 483/1960, box 1, series 245, ANUA.

Document 2

In May 1962, having already appointed Douglas Pike as general editor of the *ADB*, Keith Hancock appeared before the ANU Council to secure funding for the appointment and for the employment of editorial staff. He prepared this background paper to explain the genesis of the *ADB* and why the ANU should lead the project.

The Australian Dictionary of Biography

The Family Experience

Great Britain's *Dictionary of National Biography* originated in the private enterprise of a patriotic publisher, George M. Smith, who, having amassed in this business a large fortune, was eager to employ it in 'a munificent contribution to the literary world'. In 1882 he launched the Dictionary with Sir Sidney Lee as editor. Lee was succeeded by a man of still greater distinction, Sir Leslie Stephen. Both editors showed persistence and drive and won wide support throughout the community of learning. By 1901 the Dictionary was complete from A. to Z. in sixty-eight volumes. In this century it has come under the management of the Delegates of the Clarendon Press (in effect the University of Oxford), which publishes supplementary volumes covering ten-year periods.

The *Dictionary of National Biography* is widely recognised as an important British institution, an embodiment in published print of the national inheritance, a roll of honour, in Church and State, peace and war, science, industry, the arts, literature—from the beginning of British history up to recent times. Its patriotic value, if the phrase may be permitted, is rooted in its scholarly value. To every student of British history in any of its aspects—political or economic, literary or scientific—it is an indispensable work of reference.

The Americans were the first English-speaking nation of the New World to follow the British example. In 1922 the American Council of Learned Societies inaugurated a *Dictionary of American Biography*, which at once received moral and material help from many sources; for example, Yale University provided its editorial headquarters; the Library of Congress provided a staff for checking contributions; the *New York Times* opened the financial endowment fund with a gift of \$250,000. The work proceeded at high speed. In 1928, twenty-two volumes and an index were published. Two supplementary volumes have been published since then.

Since the Second World War, moves have been made in each of the 'Old Dominions' of the Commonwealth to launch their own Dictionaries. From my vantage point at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, I witnessed and supported the opening moves of the South Africans and Canadians. The former have not as yet got far, but the latter are well under way. The *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* was fortunate in starting with an endowment of \$350,000 from the estate of a Canadian millionaire. Its headquarters are in the University of Toronto where a Biographical Centre with a large staff has been established under the editor, Professor George Brown. Publicity has been organised rather lavishly; at the same time, solid foundations have been laid for scholarly effort on a Dominion-wide basis. The proposed lists of inclusions and authors, English and French, are published regularly in the *Canadian Historical Review*. Presumably, contributions are now coming in well.

In contrast with the Canadian effort, New Zealand's is poorly endowed and advertised, but the task of producing a national Dictionary has been entrusted to the Parliamentary historian, Dr. A. H. McClintock, in co-operation with the New Zealand libraries.

The Australian Venture

I shall interpolate here a note about my personal concern with Dictionaries of National Biography. In the 1940's I served for five years on a central committee of the British D.N.B. In the 1950's, when I started work on Smuts, I found good cause to curse the lack of a South African D.N.B. At present I have in the press four volumes of Smuts papers (1887–1919), which contain many hundreds of references to individuals. The rules of good editing have compelled me to track down these individuals and write brief notes about them. If a Dictionary had existed, I should have been saved a year or more of finicky work.

Consequently, I was anxious, when I returned to Australia in 1957, to find out what the prospects were for launching an Australian Dictionary. I was aware, of course, of the valuable pioneering work which had been done by the late Mr. Serle and was being continued by the Australian Encyclopedia; but I knew that much more than this was needed. I soon discovered that my colleague, Mr. Fitzhardinge, had the need very much in mind and had taken some important steps to meet it. In 1947 he had spent six months in the Clarendon Press, where he had made it his particular business to master the publishing problems of the D.N.B. In 1951, at the A.N.Z.A.A.S. [Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science] conference in Brisbane, he had made himself the advocate of an Australian D.N.B. He then proceeded from advocacy to action.

Soon after his joining the staff of the A.N.U., he started work on a collection of biographical information which has come to be called the National Register [later Biographical Register].

This compilation of basic biographical and bibliographical information, has, up to the present, dealt with over 6,000 persons of significance in Australian history and it continues to grow from month to month as new knowledge is gathered in. It has already proved itself to be an indispensable tool of research into—for example—the history of Australian legislatures, which are the subject matter of a useful series of A.N.U. monographs. But this is by the way. The chief value of the Register (as Mr. Fitzhardinge always foresaw) is as a foundation and buttress of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

In August 1957, a conference of historians working in the field of Australian history, and representative of every Australian university, met in Canberra. The members of the conference were asked to examine the Register carefully and critically and then answer two questions:

Should we continue the Register?

Should we go further and launch a Dictionary?

The answer to the first question was an emphatic 'Yes'; together with a request to us in Canberra to make the register available in the States and a promise of help from them to us in continuing the work. In fulfillment of these mutual undertakings, we are receiving from the States a steady stream of new material for entry on our cards, and we distribute the Register in mimeograph form to all State Libraries and University History Departments and to many Historical Societies throughout Australia.

The answer to the second question was also an emphatic 'Yes'; but the conference did not last long enough for any progress to be made in planning the Dictionary and the ways and means of achieving it. This responsibility was put upon us at Canberra. We realised, however, that the Dictionary was a national enterprise which needed a firm base of national support. Consequently, we maintained continuous consultation with our colleagues in the States and in every step which we took forward we had the assurance of their support.

By the beginning of 1960 two institutions had taken shape; a provisional Editorial Committee and a National Advisory Panel: the former was based at the A.N.U., the latter represented all the Australian Universities. At a conference held in Canberra in May 1960, these two bodies were fused into a National Committee, whose duty it is broadly to define policy. At the same time, the provisional editorial committee was constituted as an Editorial Board, under the chairmanship of the Professor of History in the Research School of Social

Sciences. The Vice-Chancellor of the A.N.U., who had been kept informed at every important stage of planning and action, approved these decisions insofar as the A.N.U. was concerned.

The A.N.U. is, of course, deeply concerned. As the proceeding story has shown, the Dictionary has its tap root here. The Editorial Board is constituted exclusively (except for the addition of Volume Editors *ex officio*) by the members of this University. We are responsible for the Register; we are providing the administrative and editorial headquarters of the Dictionary.

I have to confess that I personally made the mistake (and have suffered from it) of accepting these large responsibilities with too few resources for fulfilling them. At the Conference of May 1960 it was suggested that we ought to appoint a General Editor; but there was no provision on the budget of my department for such an appointment. As chairman of the Editorial Board, I have had the assistance of a secretary/assistant-editor with the status in this University of Research Fellow. With her support, I have tried to cope, in the midst of other heavy commitments, with a rapidly increasing stream of business coming in from volume editors, State, Regional and Functional Working Parties (whose task it is to compile draft lists of inclusions and authors) and, during the past twelve months, contributors. All this demands continuous and extensive correspondence and a heavy administrative burden. It will soon call for continuous and meticulous editorial work.

At this point it needs to be explained that the Dictionary will not, at least in its first edition, run from A. to Z. over the whole period (1789 to 1919, or whatever terminal date we choose); but will be published in successive chronological volumes: e.g. Volume 1, 1789–1825; Volume 2, 1826–1850, and so on. A great deal of work has already been done on these first two volumes and important progress has been made in opening up the period 1851–1890, which will call for a number of volumes. For each successive period a Volume Editor is appointed by the Editorial Board; but experience has shown that we must also have a General Editor, to ensure co-ordination between volumes, to maintain uniformity of standards, to provide facilities for checking and similar editorial tasks, to supervise the Register, to run the headquarters machine and—not least—to keep alive the enthusiasm of the scores, nay, the hundreds of workers throughout Australia who, in various capacities, are sustaining the Dictionary.

The all-Australian character of our enterprise has been recognised by the three learned societies—Academy of Science, Humanities Research Council, Social Sciences Research Council—each of which has passed a resolution in support of the Dictionary. It may become appropriate later on to seek more tangible support from these bodies in the form of grants in aid of publication, so that the published price of successive volumes may be kept reasonably low. Meanwhile,

it is the National Committee which continuously embodies the all-Australian element. Its partnership with the Editorial Board, and therefore with the A.N.U., rests upon a body of case law which is now being codified. The partnership has been tested and its strength proved. Its spirit may be expressed in some words used recently by the chairman of the Queensland Working Party—'We will do nothing for the A.N.U.; but with the A.N.U. there are no limits to what we are willing to do'.

In practice, we are operating a consultative constitution. The Editorial Board conducts the affairs of the Dictionary within a framework of policy nationally approved. The Board has responsibilities to the University, which provides the main financial support (although there have also been two generous private benefactions) for the headquarters establishment. The Board, however, also thinks itself bound to keep members of the national Committee continuously informed of its proceedings. In major matters of policy it would feel unable to proceed unless it had an explicit assurance that this support was forthcoming.

These rules of consultation are well exemplified by the appointment of a General Editor. Strictly within the terms of the Dictionary's constitution, the power of appointment lies with the Editorial Board. In fact, however, the Editorial Board has had to accept two practical limitations upon its power: first it had to satisfy itself that the man of its choice would be acceptable in all the Australian universities: secondly, it had to make the appointment in such a manner as would leave the A.N.U. uncommitted, unless and until Council had decided that the proposed commitment was one which it was willing to accept.

As to the second point, the National Committee expressed the wish in 1961 that the General Editor, when appointed, should join the academic staff of the A.N.U. if he were not already on it. From the description which has now been given of the Dictionary's organisation, it will be apparent that any other arrangement would create great difficulties. It might not, however, create impossibilities—at least, not so long as the inflow of contributions falls some distance short of its predicable peak. For a few years, at any rate, a General Editor enjoying rude health and able to make fairly frequent visits to Canberra might have his home base in Sydney or—let us say—in Hobart.

The National Committee was anxious that the Editorial Board, in looking for a General Editor, should not confine its inquiries to historians already resident in Canberra, but that it should survey the whole field of Australian historians. The Board, on its side, was anxious to appoint a man who could count in advance upon the support of every Australian university. At the meeting of the National Committee in May 1961, a sub-committee was appointed to make recommendations to the Editorial Board. This committee represented fifty/fifty the A.N.U. and the State Universities. After long and careful explorations, it

unanimously recommended Professor Pike. The Editorial Board, at a meeting last December, appointed him General Editor. This appointment has been received with great satisfaction by the National Committee and by historians both throughout Australia and overseas.

Professor Pike retains his Chair in Hobart. The University of Tasmania has been most co-operative in permitting and encouraging him so to organise his work that he is able to make fairly frequent journeys to Canberra. This arrangement is now working well and will continue to work well so long as the progress of the Dictionary is confined mainly to the early volumes. But when contributions over the whole period begin to flood in a 'visiting' General Editor would need to be a superman to avoid breaking down. The National Committee and the Editorial Board are convinced of this. I personally am convinced of it from the experience I gained in trying to run the U.K. war histories from Oxford. In the end, after suffering severe damage and inflicting it upon others, I had to make the move to London.

Theoretically, the problem could be solved another way, by uprooting the National Register and the headquarters of the Dictionary from the A.N.U. and planting them in another University. Practically, this would prove an impossible task.

The National Committee has expressed the wish that the General Editor, when he joins the A.N.U. should have appropriate academic status. Since Professor Pike is Professor and Head of the Department of History in another Australian University, it is my own view and the view of my colleagues in the Research School of Social Sciences that the appropriate status in his case is that of Professor. If the Board of the Institute or the Council cannot see their way clear to offer Professor Pike such an appointment, the Editorial Board and the National Committee will have to think again. On behalf of my own Department I shall say only this: that, after investing so much thought and effort in the Dictionary, we will not allow it to collapse. With the aid of our colleagues in the States we shall manage somehow.

I need hardly add that at every stage in these transactions I have kept in the closest possible touch with the Director of my School, the Registrar and the Vice-Chancellor.

W. K. Hancock
12 April 1962

W. K. Hancock, 'The Australian Dictionary of Biography' (12 April 1962), Minutes, ANU Council meeting (11 May 1962), 567/1962, box 1, series 245, ANUA.

Document 3

Keith Hancock said little publicly about the *ADB* following his resignation as chairman of the Editorial Board and National Committee in 1965. In 1986 he was invited to launch volume 10 of the *ADB* and took the opportunity to reflect on the dictionary's creation and development.

Keith Hancock launches Volume 10 of the *ADB*, 1986

It is my privilege and my pleasure to launch Volume 10 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. This volume, like all its predecessors, is an achievement of co-operative federalism on the front of scholarly endeavour. The initiative belongs to working parties in each of the Commonwealth's six States. They make proposals for inclusions—lists of the men and women whose services to Australia merit commemoration. They also nominate authors for the proposed biographical articles and suggest some at least of the evidence—in print, in manuscript and in oral tradition—which the authors will need to study.

The proposals of the Working Parties are addressed to the editor of the *Dictionary*. He is a senior member of the Research School of Social Sciences in the Australian National University. He is ultimately responsible to the Vice-Chancellor and is immediately supported by an Editorial Board—of which you my dear Ken [Inglis], are now the Chairman. Moreover, he takes counsel with a small but highly competent group of research editors. Consequently, it may happen that he will propose to working parties sources of information more ample and precise than those they have cited, and propose authors better qualified than those they have recommended. Thus the dialogue continues between the Editor and each of the six Working Parties ... Cooperative Federalism at its best.

Now let us remember famous men.

First, Percival Serle. Sixty-eight years ago, when I began my undergraduate studies at Melbourne University, he helped me to take my compass bearings. He was then a senior Administrative Officer of the University. He was also giving voluntary service as a Guide-Lecturer in Victoria's Art Gallery. In 1920 he resigned from his post at the university in order to give all his time and energy to literary and bibliographical study. For many years he remained hard at work on a self-imposed bibliographical task, a *Dictionary of Australian Biography*. In 1949 that pioneering work was published in two volumes. His son, Geoffrey, is editor of the volume which I am now launching. Viewed in historical perspective, The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has run a straight course from Serle to Serle.

Let us also remember Laurie Fitzhardinge. He is still with us, although he no longer rides to work on his horse, 'Red Brick'. Throughout the past half-century he has achieved excellence on three separate fronts of historical endeavour:

1. Classical History. Only a few years ago his book, *The Spartans*, was acclaimed by scholarly reviewers throughout and beyond the English-speaking world.
2. Parochial history. He grew up and still lives in the Limestone Plains, the region now known as the Australian Capital Territory. He was the first scholar to produce learned and elegant articles on the history of this delectable parish. He was also a founding father of the Canberra and District Historical Society.
3. National History. He produced what I call his Billy Book—a two-volume biography of Prime Minister W. M. Hughes. More to the present point, from the early 1950s onwards he worked steadily to produce a National Register of representative Australians—a tool of research which today renders indispensable service to the editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. And not only to him. Today, the Register brings grist to the mills of many and various men and women in many and various walks of life.

Fitzhardinge saw the National Register as a stepping-stone towards a Dictionary of Australian Biography which would be comparable in quality with Britain's *Dictionary of National Biography*. In August 1957 this proposal was approved by a Conference which met in Canberra. Every Australian University was represented at that Conference. There were also present some eminent 'freelance' historians. The 'all clear' for an immediate start of work on the *Dictionary* was contained in two decisions:

1. To establish a Working Party in every State of the Commonwealth.
2. To establish a National Committee representative of every Australian University.

The sequel was spotty. In the states the working parties lived up to their names. They did real work, proposing inclusions and nominating authors. From that day to this, all the authors, with very rare exceptions—I think there is only one exception—have given unpaid service to the *Dictionary*. In Canberra, by contrast, the National Committee did no real work. It was a talking shop. The talk grew acrimonious. The good ship *ADB* nearly became a wreck in Sydney Harbour. Salvage was now the immediate task.

I was chairman of that damnable national committee. In 1961 I did what I should have done in 1957. I had a talk with my vice-chancellor and, with his support, appealed to the Council of the Australian National University for funds to establish an editor of the *Dictionary* with an expert supporting staff. In 1962 a distinguished historian, Professor Douglas Pike, started work as editor. He salvaged the sinking ship and set it on course. In 1966 and 1967 he brought

to birth the first two volumes which covered the *Dictionary's* first period, 1788 to 1850. Thereafter he brought to birth two of the four volumes which cover the period 1851 to 1890. The third volume for this period was already in galley proof when Douglas Pike died on 19 May 1974. Death of a hero.

Bede Nairn succeeded Douglas Pike as Editor of the *Dictionary*. His immediate task was to work on those galley proofs and send to the printer the third volume of that period 1851–1890. He then brought to birth the concluding volume of that period. Thereafter, in combination with Geoffrey Serle, he has produced the three opening volumes of the period 1891–1939.

Where do we go from here? That question must very soon be asked and answered. However, there is another question that can be asked and answered now. The founding fathers of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* set themselves the task of producing scholarly work comparable in quality with that of Britain's *Dictionary of National Biography*. Has this ambition been made good? The answer to this question is plain. Our performance not only equals, it excels the British performance. It has been more scholarly. It has been more adventurous.

More scholarly? Yes! Whereas contributors to the *D.N.B.* have relied for the most part on sources of information familiar to historians, more often than not in published print, contributors to our *A.D.B.*, from start to finish, have delved deep into the primary sources.

More adventurous? Yes! Almost always the persons included in the *D.N.B.* have already been well known for their services to the nation in church and state, or in science and literature and art, or in commerce and industry. By contrast, the persons included in our *A.D.B.* have been widely representative of endeavour and achievement on every front of our experience as an emergent nation. To prove this point I shall cite an entry from Volume 9 of our *Dictionary*.

Edward Gilbert was an Aboriginal Australian. His birth was not recorded and his parents are unknown, but in 1905 or 1906 he began to cry and crawl in the children's dormitory of Queensland's Durundur Aboriginal Reserve. Some years later Durundur was abolished and Eddie was shifted to the Barambah Reserve. The blacks of Barambah played cricket. Richard Crawford, a wise and humane schoolmaster, saw great promise in Eddie Gilbert's bowling. Despite his low stature and short run Eddie's whiplike wrist action released the ball like a stone from a catapult. He was chosen to play for Queensland. In 1931 he bowled to Bradman. His first ball knocked the bat from Bradman's hand; his second left Bradman sprawling on the ground; his third got Bradman 'caught behind'. The crowd on the hill booed Eddie Gilbert. Umpires in the southern states began to 'no-ball' him for throwing. He was twice

filmed by slow-action cameras which revealed no fault in his action; but the 'no-balling' continued. Was Eddie Gilbert the victim of White Australian prejudice? Perhaps he was; but when Eddie died Bradman attended his funeral.

You must wait just a little longer for this evening's celebration. Here and now, let us remember famous women.

Establishing the Biographical Register was a combined operation by Mr Laurie Fitzhardinge and Mrs Pat Wardle. Mrs Nan Phillips rendered indispensable service to three editors of the *Dictionary*. Today, all the *Dictionary's* research editors are women. Looking to the future, I can see—someday—a woman working at the editorial desk.

But now at last we come to Volume Ten. I have not yet had time to read it from cover to cover and shall confine myself, now, to a few entries under the letter 'M'. For example—Douglas Mawson, geologist and Antarctic explorer; Max Meldrum, painter and ardent advocate of tonal values in the painter's art; Nellie Melba, singer. As I read this entry, I felt no doubt at all that it is the best 'brief life' of a prima donna that anybody has ever written, or ever will write.

I now launch Volume 10 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

W. K. Hancock, speech notes, launch of vol 10, ADB. Box 116, Q31, ADDBA, ANUA.