5. John Ritchie: Consolidating a Tradition, 1987–2002

Geoffrey Bolton

In 1987, when John Ritchie was appointed general editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, he must have believed that he was being entrusted with one of Australia's most respected and securely established academic enterprises. Ritchie himself was given to quoting commentators who described the *ADB* as 'the largest work of collaborative scholarship in the arts or social sciences in Australia', and 'arguably the nation's most substantial and significant publishing venture, and amongst the greatest of its kind in the world'.¹ Few would have forecast that the ensuing 20 years, under the general editorship of Ritchie and his successor, Diane Langmore, would see the *ADB* struggling strenuously to preserve not merely its standards but, at times, its very existence.

Ritchie, who was forty-six when he was offered the general editorship in 1987, was seen as representing generational and cultural change. Unlike his predecessors, he had spent his entire academic life with the *ADB* as part of his professional and cultural landscape. He was a product of one of the vintage years of the Department of History at the University of Melbourne. At that time it was Australia's leading nursery of historians, and Melbourne's influence spread to many schools of history throughout Australia, not least to both sectors of The Australian National University. His contemporaries included Graeme Davison, Cameron Hazlehurst, Bill Kent and Gary Trompf. The last two names remind us that, although Melbourne led the way in the establishment of Australian history at the university level, it was also a nursery of European historians, and the Australianists were expected to retain awareness of the European roots of Australian culture.

In this respect, as in many others, Ritchie was shaped by his University of Melbourne upbringing. Like many of its graduates, he emerged with a sense of social responsibility and a tendency to fanaticism about Australian Rules Football. It also counted that he was a history student in the early 1960s, the last years of the god-professors Max Crawford and John La Nauze. Dressed in suit and tie, they presided over departmental afternoon teas attended by deferential staff and graduate students, their authority as yet unchallenged. Feminist history had yet to make its appearance—it was in some ways a rather blokeish

¹ John Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography, 9 October 1999', Ritchie MSS, box 2, Acc 06/191, NLA. I draw on memory for Ritchie's reactions to his appointment.

department despite the presence of the impressive Kathleen Fitzpatrick—and the Vietnam War had yet to stimulate a generation of protest. Ritchie's role-models at Melbourne taught him the meticulous use of source materials, as well as the value of lucidity and elegance in historical writing, but they also introduced him to a somewhat hierarchical concept of the exercise of authority. Throughout his career his instincts were to lean towards the traditional.

John Ritchie, 1980s

Di Langmore, Darryl Bennet and Edna Kauffman relax after one of their regular Thursday afternoon games of tennis, 1980s

By courtesy of Sue Edgar

Ritchie, after tutoring at Monash University, was appointed to a lectureship in Manning Clark's Department of History at the School of General Studies at the ANU. He gained experience as a student mentor through his appointment, from 1972 to 1976, as deputy warden and sometimes acting warden of a hall of residence, Burton Hall. He was one of the first university teachers of history to take his students on fieldtrips and, in 1980, established an advanced undergraduate course on 'biography and history', which was a model of its kind. His obituaries were to stress his excellence as a teacher.²

Departmental folklore remembers him as something of a traditionalist, vigilant to resist any development that he saw as eroding high standards. He found himself much in the minority when his colleagues, mindful of an uneven gender balance among their number, resolved that if the next staff vacancy attracted two candidates of comparable merit, preference should be given to a woman. Ritchie criticised the decision; he feared that this might be the thin end of a wedge advancing sectional favouritism. In this, as in several less contentious respects, he retained into the 1980s and 1990s the traditionalist attitudes instilled in his students by Crawford at Melbourne in the early 1960s.

2 Ian Hancock, 'John Ritchie, 1941–2006', *History Australia*, 3, no. 2 (2006), pp. 52.1–52.3.

Research editor Marilyn Lincoln, 1980s

By courtesy of Sue Edgar

Ritchie soon established himself as a productive researcher, specialising in the early colonial period of New South Wales. Two of his publications established his credentials as an editor: the first scholarly edition of the report of the Bigge commission of inquiry into New South Wales, and an account of the trial of Major George Johnston for his role in the overthrow of Governor William Bligh.³ More ambitiously, he published a general history of Australia, *Australia: As*

³ John Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit: The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970); *The Evidence of the Bigge Reports: New South Wales under Governor Macquarie* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1971); *A Charge of Mutiny: The Court Martial of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston for Deposing Governor William Bligh in the Rebellion of 26 January 1808* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1988).

Once We Were, in 1975.⁴ It was remarkable both for its felicitous choice of photographic illustrations and for its clear perception that history is a branch of literature, to be written with grace and accessibility. In his introduction, Ritchie credited his ANU colleagues Bill Mandle and John Molony for fostering his love of the language, but an even stronger influence could be discerned in Manning Clark. Like Clark, his writing was enriched by echoes from the great works of English literature, though Ritchie largely managed to avoid Clark's trick of overworking a phrase. Nor could he match Clark's penchant for the role of prophet. He confessed: 'I have found it a riddle to read man's past, difficult to diagnose his present condition, and perilous to predict what is to come'.⁵

Emma Grahame worked on the Biographical Register, 1985–86, and was the *ADB*'s NSW research assistant in 1991–92

By courtesy of Sue Edgar, 1985

⁴ John Ritchie, *Australia as Once We Were* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1975).

⁵ Ritchie, *Australia as Once We Were*, p. 259.

Although Ritchie showed a perceptive interest in periods such as the 1930s Depression, and themes such as sport, he continued to concentrate on the first decades of settlement in New South Wales. He consolidated his credentials as a scholarly biographer with his life of Lachlan Macquarie.⁶ This was a project which inevitably invited comparison with its major predecessor, the learned, elegant and cantankerous life of Macquarie published 40 years earlier by Malcolm Ellis.⁷ Ritchie was generally seen as showing a deeper understanding of Macquarie's Scottish background and a greater objectivity in judging Macquarie and his critics. Perhaps also his empathy with his subject was subtler; where Ellis, as he always did in his biographies, became Macquarie's partisan and fought his battles, Ritchie showed an appreciation of the pressures on Macquarie, the outsider from the Highland fringes grateful for the approval of his seniors and zealous to prove his worth as a benevolent autocrat.

Piquantly, it was a scholar with whom Ellis had memorably crossed swords, the aged but still influential Sir Keith Hancock, who first suggested to Ritchie that he should consider applying for the general editorship of the *ADB*.⁸ Others added their encouragement. By now Ritchie had matured into a judicious biographer with form as a meticulous editor of texts, but in some respects he was not the most obvious candidate for a general editorship overseeing the *ADB*'s volumes covering the mid twentieth century. He had contributed six articles to the first 11 volumes of the *ADB*, neatly observed and engagingly written. With one exception, all dealt with characters connected with the turf, among them the late-nineteenth-century jockey Tommy Corrigan and the restaurateur Azzalin Romano, owner of the legendary Bernborough, whose feats dominated the racing game just after World War II. Unlike previous general editors, Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle, Ritchie had not served an apprenticeship by chairing or even belonging to a working party of the *ADB*.

His main competitor, the incumbent deputy general editor, Chris Cunneen, had credentials in twentieth-century Australian political history, but at that time his record of publication, despite a study of the early governors-general of the Australian Commonwealth, was somewhat less substantial than Ritchie's.⁹ Of necessity senior staff at the *ADB* have been given to subordinating their own research to the demands of their job. Conjecture about the processes of past selection committees can never be satisfactory, but in this case it would appear that Ritchie's stronger record of productivity turned the decision in his favour. Perhaps he presented more confidently in interview; perhaps the selectors

6 John Ritchie, *Lachlan Macquarie: A Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1986).

7 M. H. Ellis, *Lachlan Macquarie, His Life, Adventures and Times* 4th rev. edn (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965) [1st edn Sydney: Dymocks, 1947].

8 Jim Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life: The Historian W. K. Hancock* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), p. 493.

9 Christopher Cunneen, *King's Men: Australia's Governors-General from Hopetoun to Isaacs* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

thought it was time for an outside appointment. Cunneen accepted the outcome and settled down to provide Ritchie with loyal and effective support. After retirement, he completed a well-regarded biography of Sir William McKell, the Sydney boilermaker who became a successful premier of New South Wales and governor-general.¹⁰

ADB staff: Ivy Meeres, Margaret Steven, Martha Campbell, Ann Smith and John Ritchie, 1988

Photographer: Stuart Hay, ANUA226-689

Ritchie inherited an experienced team. In addition to his very competent deputy general editors—Cunneen until 1996 and subsequently Diane Langmore—the research editors included figures such as Martha Campbell, who served the ADB for 35 years, Helga Griffin, Sue Edgar and Margaret Steven. There were six research officers, two part-time research assistants, and four clerical staff. As the newcomer, Ritchie had to establish a managerial style appropriate to this seasoned group of professionals with much accumulated experience between them. Where his predecessor, Serle, although no less hardworking than Ritchie, had managed his team with the relaxed touch of an old professional who made sure that his weekends were spent in Melbourne, Ritchie prided himself on

¹⁰ Christopher Cunneen, *William John McKell: Boilermaker, Premier, Governor-General* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000).

being a 16-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week practitioner who took no holidays apart from the Christmas–New Year break. ‘Our project’, he remarked, ‘resembles a funnel, with the general editor being the spout; if the spout blocks, the flow will be dammed’.¹¹ He lived and worked at a pitch of intensity that revealed itself even in the way he smoked his cigarettes. After five years, his wife, Joan, persuaded him at least to relax at the weekends, but he continued to put all his stamina into the job, priding himself that in his first decade he was absent only three days through illness.

This intensity was natural to the man, but it was strengthened by an awareness that he was filling the shoes of distinguished older predecessors who had established a great tradition. He had still to learn that it is not enough for a leader to be a perfectionist; there must also be an ability to delegate. Anxious to demonstrate his mastery of every aspect of the *ADB* process, he overdid micro-management at times, probing into unnecessary detail and unsettling members of staff by persistent questioning and comment. He refused to allow staff to work on projects outside the *ADB* and begrudged allowing them time to attend seminars away from the *ADB*’s editorial work. At times, when the velvet glove would have served him better, he used a bluntness that bruised. Many of the older hands were eventually provoked into resignation, as were those who followed.

Yet Ritchie also knew that he was well served by his hardworking colleagues. He acknowledged his debt, and sought to encourage them by holding weekend conferences and celebratory dinners, and by monitoring their workloads more carefully than he monitored his own. It was Ritchie’s initiative, as Jill Roe relates in her chapter, that led to the institution of the *ADB* Medal for members of working parties and other volunteers who made exceptional contributions to the *ADB*. He also relied on Serle, who had taught him at Melbourne, and who stayed on as consultant for the first few months after Ritchie’s appointment. Until his death in 1998, Serle corresponded frequently with Ritchie, offering advice about possible entries, drawing attention to new publications, soothing Ritchie’s moments of testiness and generally playing the role of a mentor.¹²

11 Ritchie, ‘Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography’.

12 See, for example, Geoffrey Serle to John Ritchie (28 October 1988), letter box 43, Papers of John Ritchie, 1954–2005, Acc 04/18, NLA.

Research assistant Gillian Fulloon, 1980s

By courtesy of Sue Edgar

With Melbourne University Press, publishers of the *ADB*, his relations were more chequered. It happened that shortly after Ritchie's appointment, the veteran director, Peter Ryan, retired. During the next 10 years five successors came and went. Consequently, Ritchie complained: 'It is difficult from volume to volume to deal with someone who carries over no previous experience. It may sound harsh, but it is perfectly honest to report that a number of the younger staff of this particular publishing firm have been (and are) both illiterate and ignorant'.¹³ Despite this level of dissatisfaction, Ritchie entered into an agreement in 1992 giving MUP all rights of publication over all materials produced by the *ADB*.

This decision was puzzling, as Ritchie at other times blamed MUP for a want of energy in marketing, pointing out that whereas Volume 1 had sold more than 10 000 copies, the number had fallen by more than half when it came to Volume 14. Institutional demand remained steady, but private purchasers fell off. Some at least seem to have considered that with Volume 12 concluding the pre-1939 period they had sufficiently filled their bookshelves.¹⁴ Volume 12 also marked a *caesura* in that it was the last volume whose entries recorded the lives of individuals chosen on the basis of their *floruit*, the period in which they were deemed to have made their major impact on Australian history (in this case 1891–1939). Volumes 13 to 16 would consist of men and women who died between 1940 and 1980, whether they were sporting identities whose feats lay well back in the past or creative artists continuing into vigorous old age.

From Volume 13 a change was made from the sober dustcover that had uniformly served previous volumes to a more brightly coloured cover featuring appropriate contemporary works of art, but the decline in sales continued. In 1996 Ritchie persuaded MUP to release the entire series at half price on time payment, but the public response was disappointing. Ritchie thought it had been inadequately advertised. The press, he commented, 'doesn't seem to appreciate that in publishing you have to spend a penny to make a pound'.¹⁵ In the same year, MUP issued Volumes 1–12 in CD-ROM form, but Ritchie himself was disinclined to venture into the opportunities arising from the evolution of electronic technology. His entrenched preference for the handwritten, although vindicated by his unfailingly neat calligraphy, left him slow to grasp the potential of online publication. He would have argued that if the *ADB*'s production methods might be called conservative, they were also a model of scholarly thoroughness.

13 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

14 This observation is based on several cases in the author's personal experience.

15 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

Anne-Marie Gaudry, office administrator, John Ritchie, general editor, and Di Langmore, research editor, 1990

Photographer: Branko Ivanovic, ANUA225-719

In his early years, nevertheless, Ritchie oversaw a number of innovations. To cope with the increasing number of inquiries from members of the public wanting to use the ADB's files and card indexes, a position of 'biographical register officer' was created in May 1989. Hilary Kent's appointment came just in time, as the number of inquiries increased from 251 in 1989 to 478 in 1990, stabilising a little below that number. Her first responsibility was preparation of an index to the first 12 volumes of the ADB, embracing the names, occupations and birthplaces of nearly 10 000 individuals. This was published by MUP in 1991.¹⁶ A concise one-volume condensation of Volumes 1–12 was planned but abandoned; however, 1993 saw the publication of an illustrated volume entitled *The Diggers: Makers of the Australian Military Tradition*.¹⁷ It comprised 207 lives from Volumes 1–12 of the ADB. It was the first of a series of anthologies of ADB articles targeting specialised readerships which might not be interested in acquiring all the volumes.

Ritchie estimated that the editorial process involved 20 different stages, from submission of a draft article to its emergence in its final form. Like his predecessors, he insisted on reading every article when the first draft arrived, and again before the revised version was sent to the author, comparing the subedited text with the original. He believed that only about 10 per cent of the ADB's contributors could be relied on to produce excellent biographical writing. They showed appreciation that 'the central task of the biographer is ... to understand what made the subject tick, to explain why he was as he was'. Another 25 per cent wrote 'well enough'; the rest were pedestrian and in need of more or less radical revision. 'As a general rule', Ritchie asserted, 'the worse the writer the louder his howls of protest'.¹⁸ Four out of five articles when first submitted were too long. Academics were not necessarily the best performers. Some professors produced perfunctory and superficial work; but he reckoned that the best article ever submitted to the ADB was written by the journalist-historian Gavin Souter, about Lex Banning, a poet suffering from cerebral palsy who nevertheless was a thoroughgoing member of the Sydney 'push'.¹⁹

16 Hilary Kent, *Australian Dictionary of Biography: Index. Volumes 1 to 12 (1788–1939)* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991). Others indexes had been prepared: Julie G. Marshall and Richard C. S. Trahair, *Occupational Index to the Australian Dictionary of Biography (1788–1890), Volumes 1–6* (Bundoora, Vic.: Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, 1979); Malcolm R. Sainty and Michael C. Flynn (eds), *Index to the Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volumes 1 & 2 (A to Z, 1788–1850)* (Sydney: Library of Australian History, 1991).

17 Chris Coulthard-Clark (sel. & cond.), *The Diggers: Makers of the Australian Military Tradition—Lives from the Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

18 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

19 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

During her four years with the *ADB* (1988–92), Hilary Kent was a biographical register officer, research editor and worked on the Australian Bicentennial project 'Heritage 200'

By courtesy of Sue Edgar, 1980s

Curiosity led me to examine half-a-dozen *ADB* files from Ritchie's period, starting with my own article on H. V. Evatt.²⁰ There was a reminder that my article was overdue—I was somewhat cheered to find that nearly two-thirds of authors failed to meet their original deadlines—and the submitted article went to Cameron Hazlehurst, at that time chair of the Commonwealth Working Party. On the 'bluey'—the famous cover sheet accompanying all *ADB* articles—he wrote: 'I enjoyed this, but would have preferred to see more of Evatt's own words and less attention to what other historians have said. *ADB* should not be a forum for historiographical debate'. (I disagreed, especially where a character as contentious as Evatt was involved, and in the published article a little historiography survives.) Ritchie then annotated the file, generally approving of the article but observing that 'there were too many participle phrases'. In correspondence, he questioned my dating of Evatt's first membership of the Australian Labor Party at 12 November 1918, as other authorities suggested 1920 or 1924. I gave him as my source the notes that I had taken from the Evatt papers in the library of Flinders University; he accepted this, but quite properly got the *ADB*'s SA stringer to check. I would have concurred with Reece Jennings, a SA contributor who wrote that 'anyone who took exception to the way in which the *Dictionary* rewrites articles must surely have an ego of such colossal proportions that it must be something of a handicap to them'.²¹ It was hard to resist an editor who was apt to conclude his letters of advice or admonishment with: 'Yours with abiding affection'.

Delinquents were discarded. The author chosen to write about the author Ernestine Hill failed to deliver despite repeated reminders. The convener of the Queensland Working Party, Ross Johnston, found a replacement, Nancy Bonnin, who wrote the article promptly but commented: 'It turns out that Ernestine was great on poetic licence with regard to her personal life'. This created a problem about when Hill first met Daisy Bates, as Bonnin preferred 1932 to 1920, the date given in the article about Bates in Volume 7 of the *ADB*. Ritchie wrote: 'Given that the Bates article has so many flaws I think we should go for 1932. I'll ask Chris C[unneen] about a possible corrigendum'.

With eminent authors he could be diplomatic. I do not know if it was Ritchie or Serle who recruited Sir Donald Bradman to write the article about a predecessor as test cricket captain, W. M. Woodfull. Bradman produced an excellent entry requiring only slight editing: 'It is as revealing of Bradman as it is of his subject', Ritchie wrote. When the author returned the proof, however, he pointed out that his name was given simply as 'Donald Bradman', but he was a knight and also a Companion of the Order of Australia, a distinction ranking

²⁰ These files are held at the ANU Archives.

²¹ Dr Reece Jennings to John Ritchie (28 March 1990), letter box 46, Papers of John Ritchie, 1954–2005, Acc 04/18, NLA.

six degrees higher in the table of precedence than a knighthood. Considerations of space preclude reproducing Ritchie's reply in full, but he explained that he had inherited from previous editors the practice of signatures without titles or honours, and went on: 'I trust that you will appreciate that for consistency I am obliged to follow my predecessors' precedent in this respect. I do so without in any way diminishing the respect in which I hold both your title and honour'.²² The Don was mollified.

ADB staff, 1999. Back row: John Molony, Martha Campbell, Rosemary Jennings, Chris Clark, Anthea Bundock, Di Langmore, Darryl Bennet. Front row: Brian Wimborne, Karen Ciuffetelli, Christine Fernon, John Ritchie, Barbara Dawson, Edna Kauffman, Gillian O'Loghlin

ADB archives

Ritchie's diplomatic skills were tested more protractedly when it came to upholding the interests of the *ADB* from pressures within the ANU itself. Between 1991 and 1996 the three senior Australian historians in the Research School of Social Sciences, Ken Inglis, Barry Smith and Allan Martin, all retired, as did Oliver MacDonagh, who strongly supported the *ADB*. Although Inglis continued as a visiting fellow and mentor attached to the *ADB*, it meant that Paul Bourke (who had been director of the RSSS from 1985 to 1992 and became chair of the board of the Institute of Advanced Studies in 1997) was the only

²² Ritchie was a strong supporter of a proposal that the ANU should offer Bradman an honorary doctorate, but Bradman modestly declined.

senior academic remaining among the powerbrokers of the RSSS who could be expected to fight the *ADB*'s battles. His untimely death in 2000 robbed the *ADB* of an influential ally.

After Inglis retired in 1996, the chair of the *ADB* Editorial Board went for the first, and so far the only, time to an appointee from outside the ANU, Jill Roe, a professor at Macquarie University. Although she was energetic, decisive and knowledgeable, and enjoyed the staunch support of seniors such as Inglis, some wondered if her outsider status would be a disadvantage in dealing with the ANU hierarchy. The vice-chancellor at that time, Deane Terrell, was not thought to be excessive in his support of the *ADB*, but Roe proved to be an effective negotiator. It soon came to be acknowledged that she played a valuable role in providing support and complementarity to the general editor.

Ritchie's regime as general editor saw the consolidation of the *ADB*'s traditions. The writing of entries for the *ADB* had been evolving into a peculiarly specialised mode of discourse that has been compared with the composition of sonnets or haiku, allowing infinite variation within a strictly formal pattern. This mode of discourse perhaps reached its zenith under Ritchie's editorial practice. Standardisation of form was fostered by other pressures as the *ADB*'s content advanced into the late twentieth century. The entries for the nineteenth-century volumes had been chosen from an Australian population of not more than four million in 1900; there were more than four times as many Australians competing for inclusion in the volumes dedicated to those who died in the 1980s. More could be accommodated if contributors wrote tersely.

Ritchie was also careful to proclaim the democratic bias of the *ADB* and, possibly more than any other comparable works in the English language, the *ADB* found room for the eccentric and the disreputable as well as the great and the powerful. As Ritchie told an English audience: 'If the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* can be accused of being less discriminating than the *Dictionary of National Biography*, it can also be said to be more democratic'.²³ Some observers thought that the volumes of the *ADB* published on Ritchie's watch included fewer ratbags and eccentrics than those covering earlier periods, but perhaps authors were more cautious in dealing with recently deceased subjects with surviving spouses and children.

Making much of the demographic factor, Ritchie reminded his hearers that the population of Australia, particularly in the 1788–1850 period, was much smaller than that of the United Kingdom, so that room could be found for a wider cross-section of society. While most entries in the *ADB* were included for some quality of historical significance, he estimated that between 5 and 10 per cent

23 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

were included as representative samples of their era.²⁴ To some extent, however, it was left to the working parties to decide whether the high proportion of white males in earlier volumes should be leavened by more entries from other categories. Whereas women were represented by little more than 2 per cent of the entries in Volumes 1–6, covering the period 1788 to 1890, and by about 11.4 per cent of the entries for 1891–1939, Volumes 13 and 14 touched 20 per cent, but the proportion fell away in subsequent volumes.²⁵

Respect for scholarly quality was still paramount. Ritchie himself maintained an example of productivity by producing the first of a projected two volumes on D'Arcy Wentworth and his son William, a publication that consolidated his reputation as a major historian of Australia's colonial period.²⁶ It pleased him when he was asked to contribute an entry on Macquarie to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; it became the first entry in Volume 36 of the printed version of that publication.²⁷ It was nevertheless uncertain whether the traditions of scholarship could be preserved in an age of increasing managerialism in the universities, a process the ANU could not escape and which bore hardest on the humanities and the social sciences. From 1989 the Commonwealth Government adopted research funding criteria that favoured the physical and medical sciences and their practices of publication and citation.²⁸ A particular injustice (which successive governments failed to correct) ruled that articles contributed to the *ADB* were not eligible for counting as evidence of academic research productivity. No explanation was offered.

The pressures on Ritchie grew. Around this time an opinion was becoming prevalent that the ANU should concentrate on distinguishing itself in fields of research commanding international recognition. Economics, philosophy and politics might serve this aim more readily than subject matter limited to Australian history. It happened that the directors of the RSSS from 1991 to 2008 were all drawn from these disciplines, whereas the focus of research productivity in the history program tended to be concentrating on Australian subject matter to the exclusion of other fields that might have secured greater international resonance. It was in vain to argue that the *ADB*'s achievements were receiving recognition abroad as a model of collective national biography.

24 Ritchie, 'Talk to the New Dictionary of National Biography'.

25 Statistics provided by the *ADB*; however, the entries in the supplement edited by Cunneen, Garton, Kingston and Roe included nearly 30 per cent of women.

26 John Ritchie, *The Wentworths: Father and Son* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

27 John Ritchie, 'Macquarie, Lachlan (1761–1824)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [online edn, January 2008]). He was also part-author with Michael Collins Perse of 'Wentworth, William Charles (1790–1872)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 58 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [online edn, January 2008]), p. 160. He was invited to write an article on Lord Gowrie, governor-general 1936–44, but refused, suggesting Chris Cunneen instead. Ritchie to Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (21 July 1997), box 2, Papers of John Ritchie, 1954–2005, Acc 06/191, NLA.

28 For these developments, see Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2010), esp. pp. 249–53.

At the ANU in the late 1990s the *ADB* seemed to be losing ground against other scholarly priorities. It did not help that the advent of the Howard Government in 1996 ushered in a period of greater financial stringency for universities. Ritchie responded by endeavouring, during a visit to the United Kingdom, to stimulate reviews in journals such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, but the response was tardy.

More successfully the *ADB* managed to establish an endowment fund. This was a cause that engrossed Ritchie's energies, and his commitment produced results. Encouraged by Martha Campbell, Caroline Simpson, an *ADB* author and member of the Fairfax family, made a major donation. The Myer Foundation provided a substantial sum. MUP was persuaded of its duty to make a contribution in recognition of the fact that it had never been required to pay royalties to the *ADB*. These gifts were subsequently matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by the ANU administration. Ritchie did not take to the role of fundraiser with any enthusiasm, but he proved himself a persistent and tactful negotiator, especially in dealing with the ANU. The endowment fund was of lasting service in ensuring the survival of the *ADB* and stands as Ritchie's monument; but it was not enough to avert some attrition of resources.

By 2001 the number of research editors had fallen from six to four and the administrative staff from four to two. These numbers were barely enough to cope with any major episodes of illness among staff. The *ADB* responded in 1999 by moving from a two-year publishing cycle to a three-year cycle. This change was made manageable by a decision to produce volumes covering a span narrower than the 40 years traversed in Volumes 13 to 16. Instead there would be two volumes for each decade after 1980, so that Volumes 17 and 18 would cover persons who died in 1981–90.

Meanwhile members of the Editorial Board promoted the concept of a 'missing persons' volume that would supplement Volumes 1–16 by providing biographies of individuals who had been overlooked. There was a precedent for a work of this kind in the British *Dictionary of National Biography*. In Australia changing fashions in historical writing since Volume 1 appeared in 1966 suggested that greater attention should be given to women, Aborigines and representatives of minority groups, especially in the period before 1890, covered by the earlier volumes. An Australian Research Council (ARC) grant was secured enabling the work to take place at Macquarie University, and Chris Cunneen was on hand to serve as its editor in association with Stephen Garton, Beverley Kingston and Jill Roe.²⁹ Plans were also in hand for the publication of Volumes 17 and 18; but, for the first time, doubts were beginning to surface about the long-term viability of the *ADB*.

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

Might not the series be drawn to a close at the year 2000? Was it the role of the ANU to continue shouldering sole responsibility for the project, or might it be shared with other Australian universities? (There were even a few voices who questioned whether the *ADB*, with its contributors a mixture of university academics and writers drawn from a wide cross-section outside the universities, could be considered a kosher scholarly exercise; fortunately they proved a minority.) And what about the challenge of going online? The massive *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* was planned to appear in both print and electronic media. The *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography* was already advancing vigorously and successfully into the new technology. Roe and one or two colleagues on the NSW Working Party made it their business to keep abreast of the New Zealand developments. It seemed probable that when the *ADB*'s Editorial Board met in June 2002 these issues would have to be canvassed, although Ritchie's instincts seemed to favour hastening slowly.

At this juncture, in August 2001, Ritchie suffered a serious stroke. Although he made a partial recovery and survived another five years, it became clear that he would not be able to resume the duties that he had pursued at an all too demanding pace. He retained a room in the ANU's Coombs Building, where he attempted to struggle on with the second volume of the Wentworth biography, but although he bore his affliction bravely, in the end he was overcome. He died on 10 May 2006. He was the longest serving of the *ADB*'s general editors, and his performance was recognised by appointment as an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2002.

When John Ritchie was appointed to the general editorship in 1987 the Sydney historian Heather Radi wrote to him:

I think it was Bruce Mitchell who said once that all we who write for the *ADB* love and hate it. We feel that a little bit of it belongs to each of us and we would defend it to the death, even after the shrieks of protest about what they do to our articles.³⁰

Conscious of his responsibilities in inheriting and consolidating a great tradition, and confronted by pressures that his predecessors could never have anticipated, John Ritchie had indeed defended the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* to the death.³¹

Geoffrey Bolton's relationship with the ADB spans his working life. At different times a member of three ADB working parties, he chaired the WA Working Party (1967–82, 1996–2011), and was a member of the National Committee and Editorial Board (1963–2011).

³⁰ Heather Radi to John Ritchie (14 October 1987), cited by Peter Howell, '100 Years After: Reassessing Lives for the ADB' [Adelaide, 1998].

³¹ I am grateful to Darryl Bennet and Jill Roe for their comments on a draft of this chapter; also to Joan Ritchie for her advice and permission to consult the Ritchie MSS in the National Library of Australia.

Document

Phar Lap: An *ADB* entry

Barry Andrews, who contributed 27 articles to the *ADB*, also wrote one fictitious entry, in immaculate *ADB* house style, on the champion racehorse Phar Lap. Barry delivered his article as an after-dinner speech at the first 'Making of Sporting Traditions' conference in 1977. Says Michael McKernan (a fellow *ADB* author): 'We laughed until we could bear no more; the timing of the performer and the occasion was perfect. It was a privilege to have been there'.

Phar Lap, c. 1930

State Library of Victoria, H91.160/287

LAP, PHAR (1926–32), sporting personality, business associate of modest speculators and national hero, was born on 4 October 1926 at Timaru, New Zealand, the second of eight children of Night Raid and his wife Entreaty, nee

Prayer Wheel. The family had military connections, including Carbine and Musket (q.q.v.) although Raid himself had emigrated to Australia during the first World War.

A spindly, unattractive youth with chestnut hair, Lap was educated privately at Timaru until January, 1928, when he formed a liaison with the Sydney entertainment entrepreneur Harold Telford. With Telford, Lap moved to Sydney and established premises in the suburb of Randwick, a number of short term (distance) ventures were unsuccessful, although after James E. Pike (q.v.) commenced employment and Telford became a silent partner, the business flourished. A small, dapper man who dressed flamboyantly in multi-coloured coats and hats, Pike's nervousness caused him to lose weight before each speculation with Lap; yet their affiliation lasted for over two years and proved beneficial to hundreds of Australian investors.

The most successful years were between 1930 and 1932, when the business expanded into Victoria, South Australia and Mexico. Pike and Lap received numerous awards for services to the entertainment industry, including an MC in 1930; they shared with Telford a gross taxable income of over 50,000 pounds. This income was substantially increased, however, by generous donations from several Sydney publishers, including Ken Ranger and Jack Waterhouse (q.q.v.).

Early in 1930 Lap journeyed to North America to strengthen his interest there; Telford, who disliked travelling, and Pike, who had weighty problems to contend with, stayed behind. Tall and rangy, known affectionately as 'Bobby', 'The Red Terror' and occasionally as 'you mongrel', Lap died in mysterious circumstances in Atherton, California, on 5 April, 1932, and was buried in California, Melbourne, Canberra and Wellington. A linguist as well as a businessman, he popularised the phrase 'get stuffed!' although owing to an unfortunate accident in his youth he left no children.

I. Carter, *Phar Lap* (Melbourne, 1971), and for bibliog; information from J. O'Hara and T. H. Mouth; inspiration from anon. ADB contributors.

Barry's article was published in *Sporting Traditions: The Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History*, 5, no. 1 (November 1988), pp. 7–8.

Profiles

Richard Tolhurst (1930–1999), Gough Whitlam (b. 1916) and Barry Jones (b. 1932)

As 'each volume comes out, we fear revelation of some ludicrous botch', general editors Serle and Nairn wrote in an *ADB* newsletter in 1980. They had cause to worry, for volumes were subjected to close scrutiny by a group of avid readers, including Richard Tolhurst, Gough Whitlam and Barry Jones. Tolhurst, a former barrister and solicitor who worked in the Commonwealth Public Service until his retirement and move to England in 1973, wrote almost monthly to John Ritchie from 1989 to 1999 with lists of errors that he had detected in *ADB* entries. He wrote so many letters that a special folder was created in which to store them, along with Ritchie's replies. It became almost a sport among staff to prove 'Mr Tolhurst' wrong, but he never was; his depth of knowledge of Australian history and dates and quirky facts was phenomenal. Gough Whitlam, prime minister (1972–75) and the author of two entries, on Sir George Knowles in 1983 and Hubert Lazzarini in 2000, also frequently sent in lists of errors, mainly to do with titles and honorifics. Barry Jones, former schoolteacher, quiz-show champion and politician, has had a long association with the dictionary, both as an author of a dozen articles and as a reviewer and avid reader. He regards the *ADB* as 'a work of endless fascination and inexhaustible richness', but contends that the inevitable errors must be corrected. One issue that Jones involved himself with, for instance, concerned whether Alfred Deakin was born in the Melbourne suburbs of Collingwood or Fitzroy. There is no doubt that despite the best efforts of staff to check facts, mistakes do occur and the *ADB* appreciates readers such as Tolhurst, Whitlam and Jones for reporting them.

Sources: *ADB Newsletter*, no. 1 (December 1980), and no. 7 (September 1990). 'Barry Jones Launches the ADB Endowment Fund Campaign', *Biography Footnotes*, no. 4 (2009). Christine Fernon, 'Dear ADB', *Biography Footnotes*, no. 5 (2010). Barry Jones, *The Thinking Reed* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006).

Barry Jones, 2009

Photographer: Peter Fitzpatrick, *ADB* archives

Gough Whitlam with John Ritchie at the launch of Volume 13 of the *ADB*, 1993

ADB archives

Profiles

Barry (b. 1932) and Ann (b. 1943) Smith

When John La Nauze was appointed to Sir Keith Hancock's chair in the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU in 1966 he appointed Barry Smith, a graduate of the University of Melbourne and Trinity College, London, to a senior fellowship in the history department. Smith was appointed professorial fellow in 1974 and professor in 1991.

During these years and, especially after his retirement, Smith became closely involved in the *ADB*. He had been a member of the Victorian Working Party from 1962 and was its adviser on entries for Volumes 7–12, which included people who had flourished in the period 1891–1939. When he retired, in 1997, becoming an emeritus professor and visiting fellow, Smith simply moved around the corridor to take up an office amongst *ADB* staff. He was a great sounding board for staff and a knowledgeable source on medical history. He was also intimately involved with the *ADB* through his wife, Ann Smith, a research officer there for more than a decade (1977–89).

Ann Stokes had met Barry at the University of Melbourne when she was a student (BA Hons, 1965; MA, 1969). When they shifted to Canberra, Ann was employed in library and archival work (1965–76) and undertook a Diploma of Librarianship at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (DipLib, 1974). She joined the *ADB* in 1977 in a part-time position and was promoted to Victorian desk editor in July 1982. By that stage, Jim Gibbney had been working on the 8100 entries for the *Biographical Register* for nearly 10 years. When he retired in 1984, Ann Smith took over the project, seeing it to its publication in 1987. She resigned from the *ADB* in early 1989 to work in computing and information technology and, then, she became an artist.

Altogether, Barry wrote eight *ADB* entries and Ann wrote 25 entries. Barry relinquished his visiting fellowship in the *ADB* in 2010.

Sources: *ANU Reporter* (8 April 1988), p. 4. Graeme Davison, Pat Jalland and Wilfrid Prest (eds), *Body and Mind. Historical Essays in Honour of F. B. Smith* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010). Sally Wilde, 'In Celebration of F. B. Smith', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 191, no. 11 (December 2009), p. 631.

5. John Ritchie: Consolidating a Tradition, 1987–2002

Barry Smith, 2009

ADB archives

Ann Smith, 1980s

By courtesy of Sue Edgar

Profiles

John La Nauze (1911–1989) and Ken Inglis (b. 1929)

Barry Smith noted in his obituary of John La Nauze that in 1974–75 he had ‘spent much time and emotional energy safeguarding the Australian Dictionary of Biography during a difficult transitional period’. The same could be said of Ken Inglis, who chaired the Editorial Board from 1977 to 1996.

A graduate of the University of Western Australia (BA, 1932) and Oxford (BA, 1934; MA, 1938), La Nauze held the Ernest Scott Chair of History at the University of Melbourne in 1961 when Keith Hancock asked him to consider accepting the position of general editor of the *ADB*. La Nauze was about to publish his two-volume life of Alfred Deakin, and did not wish to uproot his children, who were in their final years of school. He declined Hancock’s invitation in a six-page handwritten letter. Ironically, under very different circumstances, in 1966 he succeeded Hancock to all his positions. He became professor and head of history at the Research School of Social Sciences, ANU (1966–76), and was the obvious successor to Hancock as chairman of the *ADB* Editorial Board (1966–77).

The *ADB* was in the sphere of interest of La Nauze, as head of history. During the prolonged crisis of Pike’s illness and death, and the appointment of new general editors, La Nauze was determined to preserve the dictionary on sound foundations. When he resigned from the Editorial Board in 1977, it placed on record both its appreciation of its second chairman’s ‘unobtrusive but firm leadership in its affairs over more than a decade’ and its respect and affection for him.

Ken Inglis succeeded La Nauze as head of history in RSSS and chairman of the *ADB* Editorial Board in 1977, a position he held for almost two decades. A graduate of both the University of Melbourne (MA, 1954) and Oxford University (DPhil, 1956), and an eminent scholar, Inglis had lectured in history at the University of Adelaide and was vice-chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea (1972–75).

As chair of the *ADB* Editorial Board, Inglis shepherded the *ADB* through a number of significant changes. He led the change from the *floruit* period to the date-of-death principle in line with the practice of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and *Dictionary of American Biography*. He undertook a review of the *ADB*’s constitution (*Rules and Procedures*) in 1981–83 and formally abolished

the National Committee, while at the same time strengthening the role of the Editorial Board. He also oversaw a generational change, with many original board members resigning to allow for the appointment of younger members. In 1986 he instituted a review of the *ADB*, which determined that the *ADB* would continue after the original 12 volumes first envisaged were published. Subsequently, he headed the committee that appointed John Ritchie general editor in 1988.

John La Nauze, 1965

ANU Archives, ANUA225-708

Sources: Stuart Macintyre, 'La Nauze, Andrew John (1911–1990)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 18 (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2012), pp. 3–5. Ken Inglis, interviewed by Neville Meaney (13 November 1986), Neville Meaney collection, Oral History and Folklore collection, 2053-0011, National Library of Australia.

Ken Inglis, n.d.