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It's time, 1967–1975

Despite extensive sea and air searches after his disappearance while swimming in December 1967, Prime Minister Harold Holt's body was never recovered, and his loss—in the midst of the Cold War—provoked dramatic speculation and a range of conspiracy theories. On a practical level, it meant a new prime minister must be chosen. Deputy prime minister and Country Party leader John McEwen refused to serve under the Liberal Party's chosen successor to Holt, William McMahon, and soon crisis enveloped the party. Emerging as the somewhat unlikely victor in the ensuing leadership contest, the New Zealand-born former Royal Australian Air Force pilot and long-term senator John Grey Gorton became prime minister on 10 January 1968. He took office at a key moment for the future of the honours system. Australia in the late 1960s was experiencing a phenomenon termed 'new nationalism'. This newly assertive mood of Australian identity was at least partly a response to Britain's decision to seek entry to the European Economic Community, and the wave of national soul-searching that had followed as Australians decried Britain's abandonment of her antipodean kin. Writers, artists, politicians, and thinkers around the country sought to delineate and encourage a bolder, prouder, more vibrant, and more self-consciously Australian identity for the nation. At the same time, these years were a period of counter-cultural questioning of hierarchy and tradition, with diverse social movements pressing for change, particularly in gender and race relations, and a new suspicion of nationalism and patriotic ritual.

This chapter considers what happened to the honours system in this charged atmosphere. It had been more than half a century since the creation of a uniquely Australian honour had first been proposed, by the newspaper

editor William Sowden, but that moment had not been propitious, and he had likely intended it only as a complement to British honours, not as a replacement. The mood of new nationalism in the late 1960s created much more favourable ground, and the possibility of bipartisan support for the institution of an Australian award. Had Gorton not lost the prime ministership a little more than three years after taking office, it might have been his version of a national order that today recognises the services and achievements of Australians. In the event, it was to be Gough Whitlam who created an Australian honour, as part of a wider attempt to transform Australian civic symbols to reflect the reality of Australia's independence and distinct identity.

The establishment of the new Order of Australia was, predictably, another moment of controversy for the honours system. Added to the longstanding divide over the use of imperial awards and titles was now a split over the value and meaning of the new distinction. For some an overdue statement of independence and national maturity, the Order of Australia was for others a sign of the loss of national heritage and a portent of further loss to come. On a more practical level, it was also another chapter in the long running tussle for authority between the States and the federal government. Having arrived in such a fiery birth, did the Order of Australia bring revolution also to the hoary question of who received awards, and in what fields? The chapter concludes by considering this question, asking whether there is any evidence that the first list of awardees for the new distinction appeared any different from the old. In a rapidly changing cultural landscape in which—as historian Michelle Arrow has shown—both politics and wider society were being transformed by the rise of social movements such as second-wave feminism and gay and lesbian liberation, and by the assertion that the personal was political, was the honours system also being remodelled?¹

Gorton and honours

A new atmosphere of nationalist self-assertion was appearing in the Australia of the 1960s. As the British empire declined, and with it the appeal of both Britishness and empire as bases for 'myths of identity and belonging',

1 Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political, and the Making of Modern Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2019).

writers and thinkers began to raise questions about national consciousness, and to seek a fresh sense of nationhood suited to this new context.² As Stuart Ward has put it, this ‘new nationalism’ was one ‘stripped of its British underpinnings—a self-conscious striving for a more self-sufficient, self-sustaining idea of the people, in place of the “old” nationalism with its entanglements in wider networks of British belonging’.³ Operating both at the level of rhetoric and as ‘a legitimate rationale for legislative action’, the new nationalism was a shared phenomenon across the former British dominions of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.⁴ To the commentator Donald Horne in 1968, as Ward has noted, Gorton’s prime ministerial style seemed to represent something new, in embodying precisely this kind of new nationalist spirit.⁵ He must have seemed to the Liberal Party the man for the time. Described by Ian Hancock as ‘[a] determined non-conformist and a passionate Australian nationalist’ who ‘wanted to turn thinking in the party, and in the nation, in a more independent direction’, Gorton was willing to take up the question of honours reform.⁶ But for his loss of power he might have become the leader now associated with creating a new system of national honours.

At least initially, the possibility of altering Australia’s honours system does not appear to have been on Gorton’s radar. In May 1969 he answered yet another question from Labor leader Gough Whitlam about honours. Asked if he had thought about creating a national system of honours ‘in anticipation of Australia’s bi-centenary’ (presumably a reference to the upcoming Captain James Cook bicentenary in 1970), as Canada had done in 1967 for its centenary of confederation, his answer was brief: he had not.⁷ A year later, however, in May 1970, Gorton was mulling over the idea, and asked that it be developed for his government to discuss. He was given a proposal ‘along the lines of the Canadian system’, but it

2 Stuart Ward, ‘The “New Nationalism” in Australia, Canada and New Zealand: Civic Culture in the Wake of the British World’, in *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures*, eds Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2007), 237.

3 Ward, ‘The “New Nationalism”’, 232. On this new nationalism, see also James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010).

4 Ward, ‘The “New Nationalism”’, 242.

5 Ward, ‘The “New Nationalism”’, 232.

6 Ian Hancock, ‘About John Gorton’, *Australia’s Prime Ministers*, National Archives of Australia, accessed 14 June 2021, www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/australias-prime-ministers/john-gorton; ‘Contributors’, *Australia’s Prime Ministers*, National Archives of Australia, accessed 30 October 2017, primeministers.naa.gov.au/about/contributor.aspx (site discontinued).

7 Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 May 1969 (Gough Whitlam and John Gorton).

was to come to nothing after he lost the prime ministership to McMahon in March 1971.⁸ Perhaps Labor were unaware of the proposal, for the previous month Bill Hayden, then a member of the opposition front bench, had launched a stinging attack on the existing system in parliament. Describing the New Year honours list as ‘an event ... somewhat analogous to an annual pantomime’ and the system itself as an ‘alien’ one belonging to Britain, he suggested that those most deserving of recognition had been relegated to the lower levels of the list, while the highest awards had gone to individuals who had enriched themselves, or who were supporters of the government. The system should be abolished, he argued, and replaced by an Australian one, in which honours would be given for ‘real merit’ and ‘contributions to mankind’.⁹

Regardless, Gorton’s fall ended the possibility of a system of Australian honours being established with bipartisan support. McMahon, an ineffectual leader whom Gorton despised, appears to have been uninterested in creating national honours. His use of the British system, moreover, was unwise at best, although the extent of his folly would not be revealed until much later. Attempts to obtain life peerages for the Victorian premier, Sir Henry Bolte, and the high commissioner to London, Sir Alexander Downer, despite his personal reservations—efforts thwarted by British ministers perhaps more alert to the political dangers—were revealed when the National Archives opened diary notes of Sir Paul Hasluck in 2003.¹⁰ Such excesses, to the extent they were known or suspected, could have done little for the system’s reputation. In March 1972, perhaps in response to McMahon’s honours picks, Labor member Jim Cope told the House of a (possibly fictional) rubbish truck worker who had complained bitterly to him about the way knighthoods were awarded. Adverting to the number of Liberal and Country Party politicians who had received titles under Coalition governments, Cope asserted that bestowing knighthoods was ‘in many instances ... used as a political expedient’, as well as being

8 Review of Australian Honours and Awards, *A Matter of Honour: The Report of the Review of Australian Honours and Awards* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1995), 14; Malcolm Hazell, ‘The Australian Honours System: An Overview’, in *Honouring Commonwealth Citizens: Proceedings of the First Conference on Commonwealth Honours and Awards*, ed. Michael Jackson (Toronto: The Honours and Awards Secretariat, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2007), 38.

9 Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates*, 18 February 1971 (Bill Hayden).

10 See ‘The Gong Show: Bitter Rivalries for Rewards’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2005 [online]; Brendan Nicholson, ‘Sir Henry’s Push for Baron Bolte’, *Age* (Melbourne), 10 August 2003 [online]; Anne Twomey, ‘Dishonourable Honours’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 2014 [online].

‘a method of creating class distinction’ that ought to be discontinued.¹¹ Labor, of course, had opposed the use of imperial honours, and especially titles, for decades. But for the first time in decades, they were about to get the chance to do something about it.

It's time: Honours and the Whitlam revolution

Elected on the stirring cry of ‘It's Time’—his campaign slogan—in December 1972, Gough Whitlam came into office with a whirl of activity. He was the first Labor prime minister since 1949, and he intended to waste no time in implementing the party's program. Until a full Cabinet was elected, he and his deputy prime minister, Lance Barnard, were sworn in to all 27 ministerial portfolios. Among the rapid decisions made by this first Whitlam ministry was the cancellation of recommendations for imperial honours. On the government's third day in office, moves were made to end the use of British honours; Whitlam would also decline to send to the Queen a list of recommendations prepared by McMahon before the election.¹² British awards were not entirely swept away, however. For one, they remained in use in Papua New Guinea, then an Australian territory. The government of Michael Somare had asked that its citizens might still be nominated for imperial honours, and received assent from Canberra. Until PNG became independent, therefore, the Australian prime minister endorsed nominations for British honours to be bestowed upon PNG citizens.¹³ More significantly, the States retained the right to recommend for British honours independently of the Commonwealth Government. When it was reported in late 1974 that at the same time as seeking approval for a new suite of Australian honours—under one plan to be administered nationally from Canberra—Whitlam intended to ask the Queen to ‘veto’ nominations for imperial honours from the States, at least one of the non-Labor premiers responded with strong opposition.¹⁴ Western Australia's Sir Charles Court was reported to have said that his

11 Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1 March 1972 (James Cope).

12 Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975* (Melbourne: Viking, 1985), 19, 141.

13 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 99.

14 Chris Anderson, ‘PM to Ask Queen for Ban on State Honours’, *Sun-Herald* (Sydney), 1 December 1974, 3.

government would inform its British counterpart that it strenuously objected, as well as that he thought ‘most people’ would rather have ‘an honour from the Queen’.¹⁵

Writing about the matter to Sir Martin Charteris, the Queen’s private secretary, Sir John Kerr, the governor-general from 1974, noted that ‘[t]he central question’ was likely to be whether or not the Queen would ‘be willing to indicate that’ she desired any new Australian system of honours to be ‘the only system’.¹⁶ In an earlier letter, however, Charteris had already expressed hesitation about this idea. Charteris expressed the view that replacing British awards with ‘an Australian Order’ would be ‘the best solution’, if that were ‘accepted throughout Australia’, and stated his certainty that the Queen would ‘give her full support’ to such a proposal. But he foresaw a ‘dilemma’, given the existing arrangement whereby she bestowed ‘United Kingdom Honours to certain States on the advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary’—according to the recommendation of State premiers, communicated by the State governors—as well as according to recommendations from the federal Australian Government.¹⁷ Whatever Whitlam’s early hopes, by February 1975 the governor-general was reporting to the Palace that the prime minister was ‘reconciled’ to the non-Labor States continuing to nominate for imperial honours, and to the idea that the new system would exist in parallel with the old, at least at first.¹⁸

Yet it was not only the non-Labor premiers who were angered by attempts to restrict their honours prerogative. In June 1971 the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) federal conference had decided that ‘no titles should be conferred but appropriate recognition ... given to persons who have rendered exceptional service to the community or to mankind’, a resolution the party’s federal executive interpreted in December as proscribing the use of all British awards, including non-titular ones.¹⁹ According to Whitlam’s

15 ‘PM Wants Royal Veto on Honours’, *West Australian* (Perth), 2 December 1974, 1, newspaper cuttings on the Australian honours system, National Library of Australia, Canberra (hereafter NLA cuttings).

16 National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 10 December 1974.

17 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to the Governor-General of Australia from Martin Charteris, 4 December 1974.

18 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 4 February 1975.

19 *A Matter of Honour*, 14; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 140; Allan Barnes, ‘No British Royal Honors for Australians, Says ALP; Our Own Awards Instead’, *Age* (Melbourne), 17 December 1971, 3, NLA cuttings.

own later account, South Australian Labor premier Don Dunstan was 'so riled by [this] curtailment of his prerogatives' he planned to establish an Order of South Australia.²⁰ Whether because, as Whitlam suggested, Dunstan discovered that only prime ministers could request the issue of royal warrants establishing awards, or for other reasons, the plan did not then progress.²¹ It is possible the real reason was that Dunstan shelved his ideas for a South Australian honour when it became clear that Whitlam's federal government proposed to create a system of Australian honours to replace the British one, meaning that, after all, there would still be a way to honour meritorious service by Australians.

In creating a system of Australian honours, Whitlam was drawn to the Canadian model, which had interested him since its inception in 1967.²² Accordingly, Australian officials visited Canada in 1974 and 1975, and were assisted in developing an Australian system by Carl Lochnan, the secretary of the Order of Canada, and other civil servants.²³ By this time considerable momentum and a degree of bipartisanship existed for the creation of uniquely Australian honours. Gorton had investigated the possibility, and Billy Snedden, McMahon's successor as Liberal leader, had made it known that he too approved the idea.²⁴ Public support also appeared to be growing. A February 1973 poll, which asked respondents if they would prefer to continue using imperial honours, to replace them with Australian awards, or to abolish all honours, found that the level of support for Australian honours had increased since the question was last asked in 1968. Forty-nine per cent now favoured home-grown awards, compared to 43 per cent in 1968, while 23 per cent preferred British (down from 24 per cent in 1968), and 17 per cent wanted to see all honours abolished (24 per cent had felt this way in 1968). No option was given to combine British and Australian systems. There was, however, a clear political difference, with 57 per cent of ALP voters preferring Australian awards, compared to 43 per cent of those who voted Liberal and Country Party. Respondents who favoured British awards, the

20 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 140.

21 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 140.

22 *A Matter of Honour*, 14; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 141; Hazell, 'The Australian Honours System', 39.

23 Hazell, 'The Australian Honours System', 39; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 141; Library and Archives Canada, Lochnan papers, R5769 10-5, kindly provided by Christopher McCreery.

24 Gavin Souter, 'For Services to Australia ...', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1973, 10, NLA cuttings.

Canberra Times reported, '[felt] strongly towards Britain and the Queen', while the '[m]ost common arguments for Australian awards were, "more appropriate" and "let's be separate"'.²⁵

Despite the example of the Canadian system to draw from, it took some time to design the new national system. The delay occasioned in finalising the design and instituting the new system was too much for the progressive Dunstan in South Australia, whose ability to act quickly rivalled Whitlam's. In December 1974 it was reported that while he wanted to 'co-operate with' the federal government in creating a new system of Australian honours, in the face of continual delays his Cabinet had begun considering the establishment of State honours instead. A scheme for a three-level 'Company of Merit' was said to have been produced, but it lacked support both within Cabinet, and from the wider Labor caucus. As would the federal plan, this idea drew some ridicule. South Australian literary critic and editor Max Harris was quoted calling for an 'Order of the Hairy-nosed Wombat' and an 'Order of the Dingo', but also more seriously remarking that a new generation was 'no longer fooled or impressed by the snobbish, corrupt and anti-democratic honours system', and that Dunstan ought to be informed that 'we can live without the whole load of codswallop'.²⁶ It is now a matter of historical record that no such State award was ever developed, but the scheme is significant for the possibility it represented. Unlike Canada, where provincial awards have become an established and esteemed part of the honours system, no separate State awards have ever developed in Australia, and apart from this instance in South Australia, they have never seemed likely.

If Dunstan was a source of pressure on Whitlam, so too was the Tasmanian Labor Government. As Kerr informed the Palace, both States wished for a rapid introduction of a new Australian system of honours, partly because if the federal government were to lose power without creating such a system, they would be unable to bestow British awards, given the federal ALP's determination on the matter.²⁷ Neither had long to wait. In early 1975, the Queen signed the letters patent for the new suite of Australian honours. By this time, such a move away from imperial honours on the part of one of the former dominions must have seemed natural and inevitable in

25 'New Honours Favoured By Most', *Canberra Times*, 5 March 1973, 7. Eleven per cent were undecided, as 9 per cent had been in 1968.

26 'State Honours Scheme Meets Opposition', *Canberra Times*, 9 December 1974, 2.

27 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 4 February 1975.

Britain. Canada, after all, had abandoned imperial honours—apart from a brief revival in the 1930s—in 1919, and had created its own awards several years previously, and New Zealand would shortly announce the creation of its first national award, the Queen's Service Order and Medal.

Kerr announced the creation of the new system on 17 February. Later that day he spoke about the new awards on radio and television, outlining their structure, purpose, and criteria. Observing that the move was 'a logical development' from the change in the Queen's style and titles that had occurred in 1973—when she became Queen of Australia—he explained that the honours would be conferred in her name, and with her approval, and that they would be 'available to all Australians'.²⁸ The central component of the system was to be an Order of Australia, with three levels: Companion, Officer, and Member (AC, AO, and AM, respectively). Like its Canadian counterpart, it would be without titles, and it was to be accompanied by several bravery decorations, which would be called the Cross of Valour, the Star of Courage, the Bravery Medal, and the Commendation for Brave Conduct. A long-service decoration, the National Medal, was also to be instituted, to be given to 'members of uniformed services, including the armed forces, police, fire brigades and ambulance services'.²⁹

New selection processes were also planned. Appointments to the Order of Australia's civil division would be recommended 'by a Council representative of national and state interests' to the governor-general, while the minister for defence would nominate for those in the military division and bravery decorations would be put forward by a new Decorations Advisory Committee. Nominations for the National Medal would be made to the governor-general by 'the respective chiefs of the Australian and State forces'. An office within that of the governor-general would 'administer all aspects of the new ... system'.³⁰ Criteria for the new awards differentiated the three grades of the Order of Australia in terms of the significance, scope, and responsibility of the services rendered by recipients.

28 NAA: M4799, 1/2, 'Text of an Address Given by His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, the Honourable Sir John Kerr, K.C.M.G., K.St.J, Q.C., on Radio and Television', 17 February 1975.

29 NAA: M4799, 1/2, 'Text of an Address Given by His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, the Honourable Sir John Kerr, K.C.M.G., K.St.J, Q.C., on Radio and Television', 17 February 1975; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 141–42.

30 NAA: M4799, 1/2, 'Text of an Address Given by His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, the Honourable Sir John Kerr, K.C.M.G., K.St.J, Q.C., on Radio and Television', 17 February 1975; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 142.

The AC, which would be limited to no more than 20 appointments per year, was for 'eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large'; the AO—up to 50 awards per year—for 'distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large'; and the AM—limited to 125 per year—for 'service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group'. In the military division, the AC recognised 'eminent service in duties of great responsibility', the AO 'distinguished service in responsible positions', and the AM 'exceptional service or performance of duty'.³¹ For the bravery decorations, the distinctions emphasised the level of gallantry and degree of danger: the Cross of Valour was 'for acts of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme peril'; the Star of Courage rewarded 'acts of conspicuous courage in circumstances of great peril'; the Bravery Medal acknowledged 'acts of bravery in hazardous circumstances'; and the Commendation for Brave Conduct was to be given 'for other acts of bravery which are considered worthy of recognition'. The key criterion for the National Medal was 'diligent service for not less than 15 years'.³²

The Order of Australia was given very high precedence, as was necessary if its highest grade was ever to rival knighthood in prestige. The precedence of the order was explained a few months later by Sir Garfield Barwick, Chief Justice of the High Court and the chair of the order's council, in a letter to the editor published in major newspapers around the country. At the beginning of the council's first meeting, Barwick said, its members had learned that the Queen had decided upon the place in the order of precedence to be occupied by the order's various grades. Companions would rank above Companions of Honour and knights commander of all other orders; officers would be placed above companions/commanders of all other orders and just below knights bachelor; and members would fall between companions/commanders and members of all other orders. Barwick also announced several decisions the council had taken. First, recipients of British honours were not to receive Australian awards unless they had in the interim rendered further service of an appropriate standard. Second, the council would not consider self-nominations. Third, members of the council would not themselves make any nominations. And finally, he laid out the process by which awards would be made. Nominators

31 Hazell, 'The Australian Honours System', 40.

32 NAA: M4799, 1/2, 'Text of an Address Given by His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, the Honourable Sir John Kerr, K.C.M.G., K.St.J, Q.C., on Radio and Television', 17 February 1975.

should clearly describe the services of the nominee, and suggest the names of referees who could substantiate those achievements. There would then be a process of checking, before the council considered the nominations and made recommendations to the governor-general for the twice-yearly lists, subject to the numerical limits in the letters patent establishing the order.³³

Reactions to the Order of Australia in a time of ‘new nationalism’

How was this new system of Australian honours received, in an era of so-called ‘new nationalism’? Despite the new mood, it was not an entirely propitious time for creating new national symbols. Such a task would probably always have been liable to produce division, given the extent to which Australia’s history and political culture was entangled with British institutional models and cultural forms. But in a moment of counter-cultural questioning of tradition and authority, and the growth of a certain scepticism towards nationalism and patriotism, it was even more complicated, with attempts—as was the case with efforts to find a new national anthem—sometimes seeming ridiculous rather than dignified, half-baked echoes of an earlier time.³⁴ Symptomatic of the confusion and uncertainty over national identity and national symbols, reactions to the new honours were mixed. State governments, predictably, split along party lines. The Labor governments of South Australia and Tasmania announced that they would make use of the new awards, and Dunstan stated that his government no longer intended to pursue the idea of a State honours system.³⁵ Each of the four non-Labor States, on the other hand, immediately dismissed the new Order. Victoria’s Liberal premier, Rupert ‘Dick’ Hamer, said that his State would not be accepting the system, remarking that there had been no consultation from Canberra, and that anyway his government favoured British awards.³⁶ ‘I can’t see the necessity for the new system,’ he

33 Garfield Barwick, letter to the editor, *Canberra Times*, 30 May 1975, 14. The letter also appeared in various formats in the *Australian*, 30 May 1975, 8; the *West Australian* (Perth), 2 June 1975, 7; the *Herald* (Melbourne), 29 May 1975, 3; and likely elsewhere: see NLA cuttings.

34 Curran and Ward, *Unknown Nation*. For further discussion of the complexities of Australia’s honorific landscape during this period, see also Karen Fox and Samuel Furphy, ‘The Politics of National Recognition: Honouring Australians in a Post-Imperial World’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 63, no. 1 (2017): 93–111. doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12317.

35 ‘Non-Labor Premiers Reject Honours Plan’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1975, 13.

36 Michelle Grattan, ‘First New Honors in June’, *Age* (Melbourne), 18 February 1975, 1.

stated, 'as there is nothing wrong with our present system'.³⁷ In New South Wales, premier Tom Lewis asserted that '[u]nder no circumstances' would the new awards be adopted in his State, and Western Australia's premier, Sir Charles Court, stated that his government would continue sending its own lists to the Palace.³⁸ Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the National Country Party premier of Queensland, declared that '[w]e stand by the present ... system and will continue to use it'.³⁹ Other countries envied the British system of honours, he said, and the Order of Australia would not come 'within a cooe' of them.⁴⁰

At the federal level, a spokesman for the opposition leader, Snedden, said merely that the federal opposition would consider the new awards at a joint party meeting.⁴¹ The governor-general, however, reported to the Queen that Snedden had told him privately that he 'favour[ed] ... an Order of Australia to replace, for Australian purposes, the Order of the British Empire', though he thought it ought to include knighthood, and—or so Kerr had 'reason to believe'—he wished awards within the other imperial orders to be retained. Somewhat hopefully, Kerr suggested that the States might eventually come to take Snedden's view, and he expressed his own opinion that the creation of the new order was 'a very good thing'.⁴² The Palace itself responded supportively. Replying to Kerr, Bill Heseltine, the Queen's assistant private secretary (and an Australian), noted that it 'seem[ed] a sensible way of proceeding ... if the Australian States begin to use the Order of Australia in place of the Order of the British Empire'.⁴³ At the same time, the Queen was 'pleased', during the process of creating the new system, that Whitlam had assented to her continuing to make appointments to the lower grades of the Royal Victorian Order, an honour in her own personal gift that was often conferred during royal tours.⁴⁴

37 "States Wrong to Ignore New Honors List", *Australian*, 19 February 1975, 3, NLA cuttings.

38 'New System of Federal Honours', *Canberra Times*, 18 February 1975, 1; 'Non-Labor Premiers Reject Honours Plan', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1975, 13.

39 "States Wrong to Ignore New Honors List", *Australian*, 19 February 1975, 3, NLA cuttings.

40 'Non-Labor Premiers Reject Honours Plan', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1975, 13.

41 'New System of Federal Honours', *Canberra Times*, 18 February 1975, 1.

42 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from [John Kerr], 19 February 1975.

43 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to the Governor-General of Australia from Bill Heseltine, 25 February 1975.

44 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to the Governor-General of Australia from Martin Charteris, 10 February 1975.

The differences of opinion between State and federal governments can, of course, be seen as simply political, an example of the paralysing tendency of political parties to reject any idea put forward by their opponents, regardless of any merits it might have. They were also, as Curran and Ward have pointed out, as much a matter of the wider constitutional issue of States' rights as one of national identity or independence, one battle in the escalating war between the premiers and the prime minister, as he sought to centralise power in the federal capital, and they to defend their positions as the heads of sovereign territories.⁴⁵ As Kerr put it in a report to the Palace, Whitlam was engaged 'in a running battle with the Premiers' of the non-Labor States, and, while Snedden would face 'similar problems' if he became prime minister, Whitlam's 'vigorous challenges to the States' and '[h]is manner of handling' the premiers had 'exacerbated the problem'.⁴⁶ Hobart's *Mercury* recognised these aspects of the clash, describing the stand-off over honours as 'politically puerile', and observing that '[s]urely the States and the Commonwealth could be expected to work out a mutually acceptable system of national honours'. 'But,' the paper continued, 'the concept of the Commonwealth and the States working together evaporated with Labor centralism and the non-Labor States taking issue with both real and imagined intrusions into State rights.'⁴⁷ The *West Australian* felt similarly, but was more certain where the blame lay. Whitlam had not 'taken the trouble to canvass the views of the people, the States and other political parties', with the result that he had further damaged federal-State government relations, potentially politicised the honours system, and given the country a 'patchwork' system of honours and new awards that 'might not even survive a change of government in Canberra'.⁴⁸ A more immediate concern exercised the governor-general. When, despite their opposition to the new honours, all States except Western Australia nominated a representative for the Order of Australia's council—reportedly to prevent the possibility of his nominating Labor figures—Kerr told the Palace the four non-Labor States seemed 'to have come to an agreement amongst themselves' to select public servants 'with

45 Curran and Ward, *Unknown Nation*, 217.

46 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from [John Kerr], 19 February 1975.

47 NAA: A3211, 1975/1182 PART 1, press cutting, 'At War Again', *Mercury* (Hobart), 19 February 1975.

48 NAA: A3211, 1975/1182 PART 1, press cutting, 'New Honours', *West Australian* (Perth), 19 February 1975.

a kind of watching brief', and he feared the chosen representatives might break the confidentiality of the council's deliberations by reporting its work to their respective premiers.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the dispute was also—and perhaps especially for media commentators and other members of the intelligentsia for whom the day-to-day political battles and constitutional implications were less immediate—part of an ongoing debate over identity. As noted above, and as Ward and others have discussed, in the wake of Britain's first bid to enter the European Economic Community in 1961, and its successful second attempt to do so in 1973, a 'new nationalism' had arisen in Australia, as politicians, artists, and thinkers sought to redefine the nation in more independent terms, and to establish for it a new and confident national identity suitable for a country no longer tethered to its British heritage. From the mid-1960s, as Curran and Ward have put it, Australians were 'confronted with the task of remaking their nation in the wake of empire', for Britishness could no longer provide a credible material, sentimental, or symbolic base for their self-image.⁵⁰ Official efforts to address this identity dislocation had included policy moves such as increased funding for the arts, in the hope that a uniquely Australian identity might develop from such initiatives.⁵¹ For some, these were welcome developments, a sign that the country was finally ready to mature, to let go of the British apron strings, as the common metaphor went, and to come into its own as a nation. For others, the emphasis on developing a new Australian national identity was no more than a hurtful discarding of ties of heritage and loyalty that had sustained the nation and its people since its beginning. At the same time, as this history of honours demonstrates, there had long existed a strand of anti-imperial sentiment in some sectors of the community, and a perceived tension between the country's British

49 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 23 April 1975; NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, press cutting, John O'Hara, 'NSW Still Objects to New Honours', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April 1975; NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, press cutting, Ian Frykberg, 'Names Sought for Honours', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 1975; NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, press cutting, John O'Hara, 'Half of Honours Selectors There for Ride', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 1975. Western Australia, having initially refused to nominate a representative, then attempted to do so, only to find that in the interim Kerr had nominated Sir David Brand, a former Liberal premier of the State. NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 23 April 1975.

50 Curran and Ward, *Unknown Nation*, 5.

51 See, for example, the comments of Peter Howson, Australia's first minister for the arts, quoted in Stuart Ward, "'Culture up to our Arseholes": Projecting Post-Imperial Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 1 (2005): 64. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2005.00360.x.

roots and its independent national existence were hardly new. Calls for distinctively Australian national symbols were also not novel. What was taking place in the 1960s was in this sense an intensification of the nation's identity dilemma, rather than an entirely new development.

Honours became another site in these identity wars. For Whitlam, creating Australian honours was part of a broader set of moves his government was making to bring the country's symbols into line with its changing relationship with Britain. Among those reforms were amendments to the Queen's style and titles to remove references to the United Kingdom and to the monarch's role as Defender of the Faith, and to describe her as the Queen of Australia; altering the way in which foreign ambassadors were nominated and their credentials accepted, and Australian ambassadors appointed; and adopting a new national anthem in place of 'God Save the Queen'.⁵² As he put it in 1973, the changes his government had initiated stemmed from his determination to 'put our relationship [with Britain] on a more mature and contemporary basis and to reflect the development of a more independent Australian identity in the world'.⁵³ In a later account of his government, he recalled having been 'intent on placing Australia's relations with both Britain and the monarch on a contemporary basis, reflecting the realities and the aspirations of the Australian people'.⁵⁴ This was not, as he saw it, a move towards an Australian republic. Asserting that he was not 'anti-Pom', in 1974 he sought to reassure observers that the relationship between Australia and Britain remained strong, and in his later account he insisted that neither he nor his government were—then—republican.⁵⁵ Not only the name of the new honour, but also its design, reflected this concern for symbolism. Again Canada provided a model, with those involved in the order's creation viewing that country's insignia as 'a useful standard', and inclining toward 'something from nature' for the design—although preferring 'a floral rather than animal motif', and avoiding an Indigenous Australian one.⁵⁶

52 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 131, 136–37, 145–46.

53 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 130–31.

54 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 130.

55 Russell Schneider, 'Local Titles Likely to Replace British Honors', *Australian*, 23 December 1974, 1, NLA cuttings; Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 130.

56 NAA: A3211, 1975/1182 PART 1, letter to Stuart Devlin from K. McDonald, official secretary, 2 June 1975.

Public and media reactions to the new awards were ambivalent, but almost all recognised this aspect of national identity creation in their establishment. Some praised it, some bemoaned it, and some were undecided. In Melbourne, the *Herald* thought the order 'sensible and dignified', and 'a good deal more realistic ... than membership of an order of an empire which no longer exists', while the *Age* saw the new system as 'a step in the direction of national identity', though noting that it was 'more a healthy extension of tradition than a break with it' for the honours were 'to be approved by the Queen, [and] ... grafted on to the existing ... system'.⁵⁷ Another advantage, in the opinion of the *Age*, was the 'fresh chance' provided by the new awards 'to end the shoddy cult of political pay-off which so often supplanted real merit and distinction'.⁵⁸ Also writing in the *Age*, and despite his general scepticism about the whole concept of honours, columnist Claude Forell suggested that the Order of Australia was 'less inherently absurd' than continuing to appoint people to an order 'of a non-existent empire' or other 'overseas orders of chivalry'.⁵⁹ South Australia's *Advertiser*, while sympathetic to the fact that some may mourn the loss of traditional honours and links to Britain, considered there was 'no reason' why the new order could not be as successful as Canada's. Not only would it allow achievement and service to be recognised, it would

do so in a form which at the same time embraces a national identity and abandons the relationship with ancient orders of chivalry whose significance has inevitably lessened with the passage of time.⁶⁰

And in Hobart, the *Mercury* held that although Whitlam ('and several of his colleagues') had 'some peculiar ideas about a new nationalism for Australia', some of which 'smack[ed] more of banana republic xenophobia than of what should be expected of a responsible middle power', that did not mean 'all the moves to give Australia a new identity should be condemned out of hand by the non-Labor States mainly for reasons of

57 'Order of Australia Fits Our Identity', *Herald* (Melbourne), 18 February 1975, 4, NLA cuttings; 'Australia's Own Honors', *Age* (Melbourne), 18 February 1975, 7.

58 'Australia's Own Honors', *Age* (Melbourne), 18 February 1975, 7.

59 Claude Forell, 'New Honors and Old Pretensions', *Age* (Melbourne), 20 February 1975, 8, NLA cuttings.

60 NAA: A3211, 1975/1182 PART 1, press cutting, 'Australian Honors', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 19 February 1975.

hidebound principle'. Just as Canada had, the paper asserted, Australia 'has progressed to a point in world status and prestige where she could be expected to have her own awards for service and bravery'.⁶¹

Even-handedly, or perhaps just confusedly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared there was 'not the slightest reason why Australia, as a sovereign independent commonwealth', could not have its own order, but avowed at the same time that the 'average Australian' might not appreciate 'the pretence' that British honours were not being diminished.⁶² In its 'Candid Comment' column, R. T. Foster—the man behind the 'Onlooker' persona—foresaw dangers in the dual system that had, by default, been created. Not only would there be a proliferation of honoured people, but he anticipated 'jealousy' between the holders of the rival decorations and wondered what would be the fate of the new awards when its creators received 'the Order of the Boot' from voters.⁶³ The *Australian* too seemed reluctant to commit. Although positive about the assertion inherent in the new system that Australia had 'come of age as a nation', the paper forecast that the order would be 'labelled ... the Ocker Award', and, at least for a time, 'feel a bit second-rate'.⁶⁴

There were also more negative responses. Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* thought the Whitlam Government was 'behaving like Bazza McKenzie', seeking 'to proclaim its Australianism to the point of chauvinism', while others made '[s]nide references to Gough's Gongs and the Order of the Wombat'.⁶⁵ Such mockery was not—or at least not entirely—mere opposition for the sake of it. It tapped into the broader feeling of scepticism about the creation of new national symbols identified by Curran and Ward. In the irreverent 1970s, such symbols of nationalism as anthems and awards seemed to belong to an older era of jingoistic nationalism that was now perceived as humorous, if not dangerous, and it appeared difficult, if not impossible, to establish new symbols that carried appropriate meaning

61 NAA: A3211, 1975/1182 PART 1, press cutting, 'At War Again', *Mercury* (Hobart), 19 February 1975.

62 'E and OE', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 February 1975, 6.

63 'Onlooker', 'Candid Comment', *Sun-Herald* (Sydney), 23 February 1975, 42.

64 'Why We Need Our Own Honors', *Australian*, 19 February 1975, 8.

65 'What Papers Think About New Honours', *West Australian* (Perth), 21 February 1975, 5, NLA cuttings; Jane Brumfield, 'To the Top with Honors', *Australian*, 18 February 1980, 7, NLA cuttings; 'Gough's Gongs!', *Sun* (Sydney), 12 February 1975, 3, NLA cuttings; 'Gough's Gong', *Sun* (Sydney), 21 November 1974, 3, NLA cuttings. Barry McKenzie was a character invented by the comedian Barry Humphries to parody uncouth Australian behaviour overseas.

and dignity.⁶⁶ In the *Sydney Morning Herald* in late 1973, Gavin Souter had tried to reassure readers that the proposals Whitlam was receiving from the public servants tasked with preparing the new system had no such problem. Referencing the long tradition of mockery of local titles, he echoed the famous phrase that Daniel Deniehy had used to decry the idea of an Australian peerage more than a century ago, but this time in an effort to deflect any scepticism that the new honours might be just such an object of ridicule: 'it is understood that there is nothing of a bunyip aristocracy about them'. The department, he said, had 'looked closely at' other systems, especially that of Canada.⁶⁷

Satire and mockery were also a common reaction to newly created honours, as demonstrated by the example of the establishment of the Order of the British Empire in 1917 (see Chapter 3). To some extent, then, satire about newly created Australian awards can be understood as a symptom of their very newness. Age and a sense of tradition—actual or invented—are part of what gives honours their weight and value. Before one can fully appreciate being elevated into the ranks of an illustrious company, there must be an illustrious company to join. Yet there was perhaps an extra edge to the mockery of newly created awards in the former settler dominions, which themselves were often viewed as young nations without a lengthy sense of tradition and history—appreciation of the long human history of the Australian continent being still to develop widely—and in an era of increased scepticism of both hierarchy and patriotic ritual. Jokes about local awards have also been heard across the Tasman, for instance. In the mid-1990s, when New Zealand undertook a review of its honours system and created the New Zealand Order of Merit, the country's minister for justice, Doug Graham, supported the continued use of titles in the new order, on the grounds that '[d]espite the rather quaint, even obsolete terminology, the fact is it is a form of tradition in a young country rather light on tradition'. 'I doubt,' he said, 'whether the Order of the Kakapo has the same impact as Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George.'⁶⁸ There seemed in such comments to be an air of embarrassment, a tone of uncertainty over whether Australia

66 Curran and Ward, *Unknown Nation*.

67 Gavin Souter, 'For Services to Australia ...', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1973, 10, NLA cuttings.

68 "'Sir' Go Way of Swords and Armour', *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 1 June 2003 [online]. On these comments, see also Mandy Wong, 'Royal Honours System', *Tē Ara—The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 14 May 2021, teara.govt.nz/en/royal-honours-system/print. A kakapo is a flightless native New Zealand parrot.

and New Zealand could produce the kind of solemn national symbols required for honours (notwithstanding that neither garters nor baths are especially dignified items from which to create high honours).

Reactions were not entirely focused on the issue of nationalism, however. In the *Australian Women's Weekly*, Ross Campbell reflected on the habit of dividing products into categories, such as 'economy, superior, and premium', and wondered if those who were appointed to the new order's third class would 'feel they are just regarded as utility citizens?'⁶⁹ This, of course, was hardly a new issue: British honours had long been divided into grades, and while the Order of Canada had been designed as a single-class award in order to avoid such insidious distinctions, this had soon been recognised to be too restrictive and been replaced by the more familiar multi-level version.⁷⁰ Meanwhile in the *Age*, shortly before the first list was announced, Tim Colebatch suggested that non-Labor politicians who wished to retain British honours were more concerned to preserve their ability to bestow titles upon each other than to maintain 'imperial links'. Examining editions of *Who's Who in Australia*, Colebatch had found that '[a]t least one in six' Australian knights and dames were current or former Liberal or Country Party politicians. Since recommendations for the new honours were to be made by a council, rather than by premiers or the prime minister, and since members of the public were being actively invited to nominate people, Colebatch hoped that 'purely political' honours would become a thing of the past.⁷¹ As were media commentators, the wider public was divided. According to a Gallup poll, 44 per cent preferred the new Australian awards, and 44 per cent plumped for British ones (the remaining 12 per cent chose neither, or did not know). A political divide was clear: while 59 per cent of Labor voters expressed support for the new system, only 32 per cent of Liberal and Country Party voters did so. But approval of the Order of Australia did not necessarily translate to a desire to see the end of imperial honours, even among Labor supporters, with 65 per cent overall, and 56 per cent of Labor voters, wanting them retained.⁷²

69 Ross Campbell, 'Better Than Super', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 26 March 1975, 57.

70 See Christopher McCreery, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), especially 117, 124–6, 152–4. doi.org/10.3138/9781442627963.

71 Tim Colebatch, 'Knights of the Right Parties', *Age* (Melbourne), 6 May 1975, 9, NLA cuttings.

72 'Keep UK Honors, Say 65%', *Herald* (Melbourne), 22 March 1975, 2, NLA cuttings. The proportion of Liberal and Country Party voters wishing British honours to remain was 74 per cent.

Diversity and inclusivity: Change or continuity?

As it was in the rest of the world, the early 1970s in Australia was a period of great social and cultural change. A new paradigm of politics was emerging focused on diversity and inclusivity, as a range of movements sought equality for various marginalised groups. With the gradual dismantling of the White Australia immigration policy from the end of World War II, and the development of a policy of multiculturalism, Australia's population was becoming increasingly ethnically diverse.⁷³ At the same time, there were intensifying protests from Indigenous Australians, and more assertive calls from Indigenous activists for land rights, the cessation of discrimination, and self-determination. Government policy began to respond to these calls, as has come to be epitomised for many in the iconic photograph of Whitlam pouring a handful of red sand into the hand of Vincent Lingiari, in symbolic acknowledgement of Aboriginal land rights, which his government was starting to move to accept. As in many other Western countries, too, a so-called second wave of feminism had arisen in the late 1960s, and women's liberation groups were soon forming in Australia. Challenging gender roles and family structures, these new, more radical feminist groups sought sweeping social and cultural changes. Governments in Australia, including Whitlam's, were beginning to bring feminist voices into their programs and bureaucracies, with Whitlam creating the office of women's adviser, and appointing Elizabeth Reid to the role. As Michelle Arrow has argued, Australian society and politics were being transformed by the feminist assertion that the personal was political, and individuals' personal experiences and identities were being deployed as a new basis for political action.⁷⁴

Many of these changes had begun in the decade before Whitlam took office as prime minister, but he and his supporters had embraced them, feeling—in the words of his 1972 campaign slogan—that it was time for change. For many of those who felt this way, the creation of a new national system of honours was a step in that direction, away from an old-fashioned, hierarchical, anachronistically named set of awards bestowed by a sovereign who was, to some, a foreigner. But if it was in this way a response to, or a part of, the 'new nationalism' of the era, what of those other movements for change? Was the Order of Australia different

73 On the end of the White Australia policy, see Gwenda Tavan, *The Long Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005).

74 See Arrow, *The Seventies*.

from its predecessors in terms of the ethnic diversity of its recipients, the proportion of women receiving awards, or the class status of those appointed to it? In other words, did the social and cultural change of the 1960s and 1970s flow through into the honours system to transform it as Australian society was being transformed? Was the optimism of the 'It's Time' campaign, and the symbolism of a new national award, carried through into a new era in honours practice?

The first awards for the new Order of Australia were announced in June 1975, just a few months after its establishment. Containing 110 names, the list included eight people appointed as companions, 13 officers, and 89 members, fewer in each case than the maximum number of appointments that could be made each year.⁷⁵ In this first batch of awards, there was an awareness of the importance for the order that the nominations be of suitably distinguished figures, 'whose selection will guarantee [its] quality and character'.⁷⁶ Some effort also appears to have been made to cover a range of fields of endeavour. In his periodical report to the Queen, Kerr indicated that he thought there had 'been a fine response' from nominees, despite four refusals of the AO.⁷⁷ At the highest level, the arts were well represented, with two of the eight ACs (those for author Patrick White and opera singer Joan Sutherland) conferred for achievements in this field, while historian Manning Clark was recognised for his work in 'Australian literature and history', and public servant Herbert Cole 'Nugget' Coombs for 'public services' and services to 'the arts and government'. While the prominence given to the arts in these awards is striking, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about a change in the direction of honours from one list, and particularly from an initial list such as this, for which such prominent cultural figures were perhaps natural—even obvious—choices.

Moreover, if such generous recognition of the arts was something of a new departure, there was also a hefty serving of traditional awards. Besides the honour for Coombs, a public servant, one companionship went to a businessman (Sir Lindesay Clark, for services to the mining industry); one to a politician (Eric Reece, the former Tasmanian Labor premier);

75 '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1.

76 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 23 April 1975; NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from John R. Kerr, 4 February 1975.

77 NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from [John Kerr], 11 June 1975. The four refusals came from the poet Judith Wright, the journalist Tom Fitzgerald, the painter Sidney Nolan, and Jerry Price, the chair of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization.

and two were appointments to the military division (Lieutenant-General Frank Hassett, the chief of the army general staff, and Admiral Sir Victor Smith, the chair of the chiefs of staff committee).⁷⁸ There was, nevertheless, something of Whitlam's broader vision for Australia here, and a definite flavour of 'new nationalism'. Clark, of course, was well known for his writings on the history of Australia, and was just beginning to assume the role of the prophet of Australian identity and nationalism that he would later seem to embody, while Coombs, through his role in supporting the arts, had contributed much to the push for a new and vibrant Australian literary and artistic voice.

A range of professions were honoured at the officer level, though with an unusual emphasis on science, research, and education. Four of the 13 AOs—half of those awarded in the civil division—went to individuals involved in these fields: Geoffrey Badger was the vice-chancellor of the University of Adelaide, where he had also been a professor of organic chemistry; Antarctic scientist Phillip Law was a former director of the Antarctic division at the Department of External Affairs and the vice-president of the Victoria Institute of Colleges; Byron Kakulas was a medical researcher specialising in muscular diseases and neuropathology; and Geoffrey Blainey was a professor of history at the University of Melbourne and the chair of the literature board of the Australia Council. The other AOs bestowed in the civil division encompassed two for community service or social welfare work (David Scott, the director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and Giacomo 'Jim' Bayutti, 'a confidante of' Whitlam who worked to assist migrants); one for 'transportation and public service' (Allan George Gibbs); and one for 'management and international relations' (Allan George Moyes).⁷⁹ Five men were appointed AO in the military division: Rear Admiral Geoffrey Gladstone, Major-General Stuart Graham, Air Vice-Marshal Geoffrey Newstead, Major-General Cedric 'Sandy' Pearson, and Major-General Alan Stretton, who had been director-general of the Natural Disasters Organisation and had headed the emergency operation during Cyclone Tracy in Darwin the previous year.⁸⁰ It might also be noted that four of the 13 were named Geoffrey, surely an anomaly demonstrating that not all statistics are meaningful.

78 'First List of Australian Order', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 9; '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1.

79 'Multicultural Pioneer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1991, 4; 'First List of Australian Order', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 9; '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1.

80 'First List of Australian Order', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 9; '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1.

A great deal of variety is evident among the names appointed to the third level of the order, the membership. Besides the 36 individuals who became members of the military division, the awards recognised activities as diverse as soil conservation (Sam Clayton, the first director of the New South Wales Soil Conservation Service); 'amateur sport' (David Henry McKenzie); aviation (Sergeant Ralph John Naughton); and 'photography and the study of nature' (Athel D'Ombrian, an optical dispenser who became a naturalist and photographer). Easily the largest clusters of awards in the civil division appointments were those for community service or services to social welfare, of which there were 19, and those for services to local government, of which there were eight.⁸¹ These are both significant proportions: 36 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. After these fields of endeavour, the next most commonly recognised were the arts, industry and commerce, conservation and the environment, and education, with stray awards for other types of activity (such as two for trade union activity, one for sport, and one for journalism).⁸² In this sense, the list both followed tradition—both community service and service to local government were traditionally common categories in honours lists, particularly at the lower levels—and departed from it, as in the extent of recognition given to individuals active in the arts and in environmental causes. It is notable that, unlike in almost all lists of British honours, excepting those during the two world wars, the military AMs outnumbered the next biggest category, making military service seem the most highly awarded at this level on this list. It is possible, however, that this is a reflection of the order's new existence, which meant that both divisions of the order were, as it were, empty, and needing to be filled, and it was not necessarily a pattern to be expected in the future.

In a context of intense movements for social and political change, which Whitlam's own 'It's Time' campaign had appealed to, it might have been expected that this first list of awards in the new order would look different in terms of demographics, too. But how far was any such hope borne out? At the upper levels of the new order, the answer must be: not especially. Only one of the eight people appointed as companions of the order was a woman. Joan Sutherland, as an internationally renowned opera singer

81 'First List of Australian Order', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 9; '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1. Another two were conferred for services to women's welfare, and to Aboriginal welfare, respectively.

82 'First List of Australian Order', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 9; '110 Get Order of Australia', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1975, 1.

who was widely popular and unlikely to be a controversial choice, was in many ways an obvious inclusion. No women, however, were included among the 13 individuals who were made officers.⁸³ The proportion was more respectable, if hardly groundbreaking, among the third tier, with 20 women made members of the order, six of those in the military division. This represents a total proportion of around 22 per cent of members, and 17 per cent of military division memberships. It is much more difficult, as always, to ascertain the ethnic breakdown of the list. While there are a couple of names that appear recognisably non-Anglo-Australian, any attempt at statistics is largely guesswork, and any assertion made on the basis of names alone is even more flawed than in the case of gender, potentially concealing long residence (even generations long) in Australia and missing recent migrants, particularly those who had anglicised their names. It is notable, however, that there is only one recognisably non-European name in the list: Jusaf John Khan, an appointment on the military list. Other signs, though, did suggest that there was at least some desire to recognise individuals connected with these new social movements. Irene Greenwood, a radio broadcaster and feminist, was made AM for her services to women's welfare. Keith Langford-Smith, who was a non-Indigenous missionary at Roper River and then Kellyville in New South Wales, was appointed AM for services to Aboriginal welfare. And, as mentioned above, Jim Bayutti was appointed AM for his services to the migrant community. These awards did suggest an openness to recognising the efforts of those who were working for social inclusion, equality, and rights in these diverse areas.

Was this any better than the record under Gorton or McMahon, or on recent State honours lists? Or indeed, than the lists issued under Menzies, Holt, or any other earlier leader? It has to be said that, purely on the numbers, it was not. Looking at all appointments to the Order of the British Empire, both federal and State, in the years 1965 to 1969, women had made up 4.8 per cent of CBEs (commanders), 11.1 per cent of OBEs (officers), and 26.3 per cent of MBEs (members), the latter proportion particularly notable for being higher than the 22 per cent of AMs granted to women in that first Order of Australia list. In the following five-year period, from 1970 to 1974, the difference is similar, with women receiving 8.2 per cent of CBEs, 12.2 per cent of OBEs, and 26.1 per cent

83 One, however, had been nominated: the poet Judith Wright, who had declined. NAA: AA1984/609, PART 1, letter to Sir Martin Charteris, private secretary to the Queen, from [John Kerr], 11 June 1975.

of MBEs. At the level of titles, women had gained 22.9 per cent of awards between 1965 and 1969, and 24.2 per cent of them from 1970 to 1974 (see tables provided in Chapter 4). These figures, however, may simply reflect the difficulty in getting enough names for the first list for the Order of Australia, and perhaps also being in a hurry, factors which might have frustrated any efforts to ensure a more evenly gender balanced list.

Nor did the new order's first list compare especially well to recent lists of British awards in relation to ethnic diversity. Numbers of awards to Indigenous Australians had been slowly increasing after the first identifiable award (an MBE to pastor and activist Doug Nicholls) in the 1950s. Several Indigenous Australians had been honoured in the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the New Year list for 1968, Methodist minister Lazarus Lamilami and activist Margaret (Lilardia) Tucker were appointed MBE, and medical assistant Phillip Roberts received a British Empire Medal (BEM), while Nicholls was promoted to OBE and boxer Lionel Rose made MBE in June.⁸⁴ Community leaders Nandjiwarra Amagula and Teddy Plummer were granted respectively an MBE and a BEM at New Year 1970, while that June MBEs were conferred on poet Kath Walker (later known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal), community worker Annie Rankine, and the chair of the South Australian Aboriginal Lands Trust, Timothy Hughes, and BEMs on guide and interpreter Tommy Dodd and tracker Nyibayarri, known as Jack Bohemia or Newbu.⁸⁵ Among those appointed MBE in 1971 were community leader Gladys Elphick, artist Yirawala, land rights activist Roy Marika, and former army officer Reg Saunders, by then a liaison officer in the Office of Aboriginal

84 '3 Territorians in Queen's New Year's Honors', *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), 1 January 1968, 3, NLA cuttings; Keith Cole, 'Lamilami, Lazarus (1913–1977)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 14 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lamilami-lazarus-10778/text19113. These and other awards mentioned in this section may be found at Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Australian Honours Search Facility', *It's an Honour*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, accessed throughout this project, honours.pmc.gov.au/honours/search (see Author's Note).

85 'These Are Leaders—Giese', *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), 2 January 1972, 3, NLA cuttings; 'Works For Her People', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 13 June 1970, 4, NLA cuttings; 'Jack Traps a Medal', *Herald* (Melbourne), 13 June 1970, 2, NLA cuttings; W. H. Edwards, 'Dodd, Tommy (1890–1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 14 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dodd-tommy-10027/text17677; Judith Raftery, 'Rankine, Annie Isabel (1917–1972)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 14 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rankine-annie-isabel-11488/text20487; Robert Hall, 'Hughes, Timothy (1919–1976)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 14 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hughes-timothy-10567/text18767.

Affairs.⁸⁶ In 1972, Nyamal lawman Peter Coppin received a BEM for 'services to the Aboriginal community' on the New Year list, and didjeridu player George Winunguj was appointed MBE for his 'services to the community and the performing arts' on the birthday list.⁸⁷ Australia had also gained its first Aboriginal knight in 1972: Nicholls, whose name appeared on the federal list at Queen's Birthday that year. While most other names on the lists remained—insofar as names are any guide—largely Anglo-Celtic, it is worth noting that the same Commonwealth list that announced Nicholls's knighthood also contained the names of William Lee, who for 25 years had 'assisted Chinese migrants to adapt to the Australian way of life' and who was appointed MBE for 'services to the community'; Giacomo Natoli, awarded the BEM for 'services to the Italian community'; and Elda Vaccari, who received the same honour for her 'services to migrants'.⁸⁸

It was not the case, however, that recent lists of imperial awards had been shining beacons of diversity, or had gone uncriticised. During the late 1960s and early 1970s several articles had appeared in the media critiquing the system, a common target being the occupational balance of awards. As discussed in the previous chapter, in October 1968 Don Aitkin had perceived the system as stale and rigid, citing among other aspects the occupational balance of the lists.⁸⁹ A little more than three years later he returned to the issue, and argued for the abolition of the whole system, or, if that was too much to swallow, at least its alteration.⁹⁰ There had been other signs of discontent in recent years, too. Unhappy with the low-level awards often given to community workers and those in the arts (two occupations where women were more likely to figure), two women in 1972 planned to send back their awards, announced that June. Rose Skinner, an art gallery owner from Perth, was quoted saying that her MBE

86 'Awards for 10 Territorians', *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), 12 June 1971, 1, NLA cuttings; E. M. Fisher, 'Elphick, Gladys (1904–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 14 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/elphick-gladys-12460/text22411.

87 Jolly Read and Peter Coppin, *Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1999), 163; 'The 1972 Queen's Birthday Honours List', *Canberra Times*, 3 June 1972, 8; 'Five Territorians Honored—Including George Winunguj', *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), 3 June 1972, 3, NLA cuttings.

88 'The 1972 Queen's Birthday Honours List', *Canberra Times*, 3 June 1972, 8; 'Five Territorians Honored—Including George Winunguj', *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), 3 June 1972, 3, NLA cuttings.

89 Don Aitkin, 'Between the Lines', *Canberra Times*, 16 October 1968, 2.

90 Don Aitkin, 'Now, If I Were King, There'd Be a Different Honours List', *National Times*, 10–15 January 1972, 12, NLA cuttings.

was ‘an insult to Western Australia’. She had accepted it, she said, while in hospital, in the belief that she was being offered an OBE (still a grade lower than the CBE she thought her efforts in support of artists deserved), and she now wished to reject it.⁹¹ It was then reported that Mary Logus, described as an ‘elderly Red Cross worker’, had said that she would not accept her BEM either. Quoted terming it ‘an insult and a slap in the face’ to volunteers, she compared it to the MBEs received by the Beatles, declaring that ‘[a]ny voluntary worker should be equal at least to a prize fighter, the Beatles or what have you’. ‘I am not speaking for myself,’ she said, ‘but on behalf of all voluntary workers.’⁹² Skinner, meanwhile, was reported to have changed her mind. She had been ‘overcome with the feeling that the honor was an insult to the art medium’, she said, but had decided to accept it after reflecting that ‘any small recognition might help the plight of the artist’.⁹³

Nor were awards, in and of themselves, always welcome or acceptable. Adding names to a list, even in an admirable attempt to increase diversity, could in some cases ignore underlying or larger issues, or cause hurt and offence. In the New Year list for 1972, Indigenous community leader Jacob Oberdoo had rejected a BEM, reportedly informing the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet that, as ‘a law carrier’, he could not ‘do business with or accept favours from law carriers in bad standing’. Asserting the supremacy of Indigenous law, Oberdoo challenged white Australians’ lack of knowledge and respect for it, and the usurpation and exploitation of his people’s land.⁹⁴ In another news report, he was quoted stating that Aboriginal people had neither land nor money, and ‘haven’t had much help from any government’. ‘They don’t need medals,’ he said.⁹⁵ How the sounding process had failed so signally that the award was announced without his approval—and the same year as Logus received the BEM despite having, as she claimed, refused it—is not easy to determine.

91 ‘Gallery Owner Plans to Return Her MBE’, *Canberra Times*, 3 June 1972, 9.

92 “‘I’ll Send Back BEM’”, *Herald* (Melbourne), 3 June 1972, 1, NLA cuttings. A miscommunication of some kind appeared to have occurred, for she said that she had declined the award when sounded, and that her declining had been acknowledged; she would have ‘considered’ an MBE. “‘I’ll Send Back BEM’”, *Herald* (Melbourne), 3 June 1972, 1, NLA cuttings.

93 “‘I’ll Send Back BEM’”, *Herald* (Melbourne), 3 June 1972, 1, NLA cuttings.

94 ‘Aborigine Rejects Honour’, *West Australian* (Perth), 15 January 1972, 1, 4, NLA cuttings; John Bucknall, ‘Oberdoo, Jacob (Minyjun) (1920–1989)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 13 July 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oberdoo-jacob-minyjun-15386/text26593.

95 ‘Aborigine Rejects Empire Medal’, *Canberra Times*, 20 January 1972, 15.

In Oberdoo's case at least, it may simply have been a consequence of the time required for the post to reach recipients in remote places and return to Canberra.

Conclusion

By the time Harold Holt was lost in the surf at Cheviot Beach in 1967, many previously accepted fundamentals of Australian life had already begun to disappear. A new mood of assertive nationalism had begun to arise, with far-reaching consequences for the honours system as for so many other aspects of national existence. In the wake of Britain's decision to seek entry to the European Economic Community, Australia entered a new and unsettling era, in which civic symbols such as honours played an important role as prisms through which identity and the future of the nation could be debated. Coming to power on a platform of change in 1972, Whitlam brought his reforming energy to the honours system as to so much else. The establishment of the Order of Australia brought mixed reactions, emblematic of the broader political and generational divides produced by this uncertain period. To some a second-rate newcomer, lacking the gravitas and tradition of imperial awards and symbolising the loss of a valued British heritage, it was greeted by others as an exciting step towards national maturity and independence. Yet perhaps even more importantly, it was also a theatre in the ongoing war over States' rights, to which the election of Whitlam had given a new intensity. In the coming years, the battle over States' rights would continue to shape the honours system in ways distinct from the trajectory taken in other former British dominions and colonies. Birthed in such fire, the Order of Australia needed to make a strong start to its life to win acceptance, and the first list of awards included a number of prominent figures whose inclusion might aid that goal. In some ways quite distinctive, the list was yet by no means a dramatic shift in the pattern of awards. How the order would have developed under Whitlam and Labor must remain a matter of speculation, for its very existence would soon be threatened.

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