

# Australia's Oldest Historical Journal

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Although much has been written about the Royal Australian Historical Society, the *Journal* has received little attention, partly perhaps, because its history does not seem particularly momentous. At first glance little of significance appears to have occurred. The picture that comes to mind is of a succession of editors working quietly behind the scenes, reading and revising manuscripts, correcting proofs and at intervals issuing a finished product. The relationship between the editors was generally harmonious and there was nothing to compare with the clashes that coloured and sometimes disrupted the life of the Society. Yet, the absence of drama does not mean that the *Journal* lacks interest and significance. Indeed it has many claims to attention. Whether it was the first of its kind can be questioned, for in 1891 the *Transactions* of the defunct Victorian based Historical Society of Australasia, founded in 1885, were published in an attempt to revive that body.<sup>1</sup> The move failed and not until 1911 did the newly formed Victorian Historical Society issue a *Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> Its New South Wales counterpart was by then five years old and can thus claim a longer existence than any other Australian historical journal. To date there have been seventy nine volumes comprising nearly 400 parts and over 1,500 articles by some 800 contributors. The quantifiers, who currently enjoy an unwarranted ascendancy in Australia, would doubtless rejoice at these figures, for they provide a means of measuring a cultural activity. If the Society was a university History Department it would be awarded points and government funding for tangible evidence of what would be regarded as achievement.

The *Journal*, however, is a product of intellectual curiosity and cannot be evaluated statistically. Indeed, it is the fruit of varied minds

1 P. Biskup, 'The Historical Society of Australasia, 1885-61', *Canberra Historical Journal*, No. 23, March 1989, p.15.

2 A.W. Greig, 'The Origin of the Historical Society of Victoria', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3, August 1979, p. 107.

operating over many decades but united in a common concern for the past. Most of the early articles, often inaccurate in their own day, are now dated, while others may well become so. But all retain a value as historical documents. Besides adding to knowledge they shed light on the attitudes of their authors and on the changes that have occurred in the approach to Australian history. Viewed from this standpoint the *Journal* acquires additional significance. In it are to be found papers, the writing of which dates back to November 1900 when the first address was delivered to the provisional committee. This means that the *Journal* has formed part of the fabric of Australian historiography since the beginning of the twentieth century. How it relates to developments in this field is a question that needs to be considered. Important too is the relationship between the *Journal* and the Society whose interests it was designed to serve.

The Australian Historical Society, as it was first known, originated at a time when the study of Australian history was still in its infancy.<sup>3</sup> Although many books and articles had been written on this subject all were by men, and to a less extent women, who possessed no training as historians. This was not surprising, for it was not until the late nineteenth century that history was taught systematically at university. Sydney set the lead by creating the Challis Chair of History and appointing the young Oxford scholar, George Arnold Wood to it in 1891.<sup>4</sup> Yet neither here nor elsewhere was Australian history offered to students by the opening of the twentieth century. Resources were too limited and the British and European heritage were considered more deserving of study. Wood had already become interested in Australia's past, but the impetus behind the formation of an Historical Society, came not from the university, but from a small group of public-spirited men with longstanding interests in the past and a belief in the need to act collectively so as to preserve knowledge and ensure that it was recorded accurately. The first moves were made in 1898,

3 S. Macintyre, 'The Writing of Australian History', *Australians. A Guide to Sources*, (ed.) D.H. Borchart, Adelaide, 1987; H. Heaton, 'The Progress of Historical Studies in Australia', *Journal of Modern History*, December 1943.

4 R. M. Crawford, "A Bit of a Rebel" *The Life and Work of George Arnold Wood*, Sydney, 1975, p.110; B.H. Fletcher, 'G.A. Wood and J.F. Bruce 1891-1930', *History at Sydney Centenary Reflections*, B. Caine et al (eds), Sydney, 1992, pp. 1-4.

but it took a dispute in 1900 over the date on which the foundation stone at Saint Philip's church, Sydney, had been laid and a plea from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, before action was taken.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge of this background helps explain the early history of the *Journal*. Some of the Society's founders were already noted as historical lecturers and writers. They sought a further outlet for their findings, and those of other members, in a journal designed to provide essential knowledge of the past, to educate the public and to draw attention to the Society. Such a publication was envisaged from the outset, but a shortage of funds made action impossible until 1906 when membership exceeded one hundred. The original idea had been to publish quarterly, charging members five shillings a year, or one shilling and threepence a copy.<sup>6</sup> It was decided, however, to issue the *Journal* free to members and charge non-members in the hope of encouraging them to join.<sup>7</sup> Membership had in fact doubled by the eve of World War 1 and grew at the same rate over the next four years, reaching a total of 464 by 1918.<sup>8</sup> How far the *Journal* was responsible for this growth is difficult to say, but it must have had some impact. The additional funds, supplemented as they were by a small government subsidy to the Society, placed the *Journal* on a secure footing and guaranteed its immediate future.

The full title of the new publication casts further light on the intentions of its founders. The inclusion of the words 'and Proceedings' after 'Journal' reflected a desire to relate its contents to what went on at the monthly meetings. Above all, the *Journal* existed as an outlet for the papers that were delivered on those occasions and every effort was made to ensure that all were made available for publication. Problems were at once occasioned by the Society's inability to issue the first number until 1906. The delay meant that there was a six year

5 K.R. Cramp, 'The Australian Historical Society - The Story of its Foundation', *JRAHS*, 1917, Vol. 4, pt. 1; M. Jacobs, 'The Royal Australian Historical Society 1900-1985 pt. 1, "Students of a like Hobby"', *JRAHS*, Vol. 73, pt. 4, April 1988; *SMH* 21 April 1900, 22 October 1900.

6 Australian Historical Society, Second Annual Report, p.10; Third Annual Report; p. 13; typescript in A. Houison Papers, Mitchell Library (ML), p. 10.

7 *Fourth Annual Report*, pp. 18-19, Houison Papers.

8 *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 1918, p.2, *JRAHS* Vol. 4, 1918.

backlog of papers and it was not until September 1908 that the last of them appeared. Meanwhile, additional papers had been given and the task of coping with them and with those delivered subsequently, at a time when resources were limited, raised continuing worries. By 1915 everything was finally brought up-to-date and the editors began to include other material such as historical notes, reports of excursions and answers to readers' questions.<sup>9</sup> The quality of the paper was improved, the size of the print was increased and the cover, originally somewhat austere, was re-designed by J.E. Branch, Superintendent of Art in the Education Department.<sup>10</sup> He sought to create an Australian flavour by means of a border of native vines and flowers. He moved the list of contents to the back, leaving only the title and insignia on the front, together with the date and volume number.

The early issues of the *Journal* reflected the difficulties under which it operated. Some of the articles in the first volume were brief and discursive. Occasionally only the name of the author and the title of the address would appear, pointing to the inability of the editors to obtain the full paper. Proceedings were opened by the wealthy businessman and bibliophile, Alfred Lee, who had been promised this honour in return for his support in forming the Society.<sup>11</sup> He gladly seized the opportunity to express his views on what became an issue of longstanding controversy - namely whether Governor Phillip landed on the east or west side of Camp Cove in January 1788.<sup>12</sup> Most of the papers delivered over the next two years also related to early Sydney. They were prepared by experts such as J.P. McGuanne and Edward Stack of the Lands Department, Norman Selfe, the celebrated engineer and Dr Andrew Houison, the Society's first president.<sup>13</sup> Such con-

tributions formed part of a wider concern with local history that featured strongly in the early *Journals*. Among the leading enthusiasts were Frank Walker, noted for his work as a photographer, the Reverend James Steele, Rector of the historic Saint Matthew's church, Windsor, and James Gormly MLA, the colourful Irish born Murrumbidgee identity.<sup>14</sup> There were also articles on early churches, explorers and governors including one on Governor Bligh by F.M. Bladen, editor of the *Historical Records of New South Wales* and Librarian of the Public Library. In addition, papers were presented on the defences of Australia by Grace Hendy-Pooley, daughter of an army officer with interests in military history, and later a feature writer for the Sydney press.<sup>15</sup>

Thus were laid the foundations for the development of the *Journal* between 1908 and the eve of World War 1. Several of the early contributors continued to feature, some at regular intervals. Newcomers also appeared, amongst them J.H. Maiden, Director of the Botanical Gardens, who sought to win greater recognition for the early botanists and for his hero, Sir Joseph Banks.<sup>16</sup> R.H. Cambage, under-secretary to the Department of Mines, brought his expertise as a surveyor to bear on the early explorers, C.H. Bertie, the Sydney Municipal Librarian, lectured on Matthew Flinders, while J. Dalgarno, former Deputy Postmaster General, traced the development of the postal service.<sup>17</sup> J.A. Hogue, the journalist and politician, maligned Governor Darling in a one-sided paper on the Sudds-Thompson affair.<sup>18</sup> H.J. Rumsey, founder of a leading seed company and of the Genealogical Society, signalled his appearance with an article on early Dundas.<sup>19</sup> Others spoke

9 *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1915, p.9, *JRAHS* Vol. 3., pt. 2, 1915.

10 *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1915, p.9, *JRAHS* Vol. 3, pt. 2, 1915.

11 M. Lee, Papers (ML) 2903/7, pp 64-5, 2903/8, pp. 95 ff.; for details of articles by Lee and other contributors featured in the present article see D.I. McDonald, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society Guide to Contents Volumes 1 to 65, 1901 to 1980*, Sydney, 1984.

12 For an account of this controversy see B.H. Fletcher, *Australian History in New South Wales 1888-1938*, Sydney, 1993, pp. 140-3.

13 See J.P. McGuanne's account of his career in *The Public Service Journal*, Vol. 10 February 1908. 'Edward Stack, A Pioneer Historian', *SMH*, 9 January 1913; 'Norman Selfe', *ADB*, Vol. 6; A. Houison, Obituary, *Sun* 22 August 1912, Houison, Papers (ML) Ah 116, B 331.

14 J. Steele, 'Early Days of Windsor'. (ML) A 1800, R. Gormly, *Hon. J. Gormly MLC of Wagga Wagga*, Pymble, 1959; J. Gormly, 'Reminiscences', 3 vols. (ML).

15 Grace Hendy-Pooley, Letters (ML) MSS 1261, 4 Boxes; A. and M. Osborn, *The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library 1901-27 and the Origin of the National Library of Australia*, Canberra, 1989, p.45.

16 'J. H. Maiden', *ADB*, Vol. 10; Newspaper Cuttings, Vol. 4 (ML) FM 7711; for the progress of the *Journal* see the Annual Reports.

17 'R.H. Cambage', *ADB*, Vol. 7; H. Wright, 'The Late Charles Henry Bertie', *JRAHS*, Vol. 38, pt. 5, 1952.

18 *SMH*, 23 April 1908, 8 February 1915.

19 O.B. Waldron McCarthy, "'H.J. Rumsey, the Society of Australian Genealogists'" An introduction', *Descent*, Vol. 3, Pt. 3, 1967; *ADB*, Vol. 11.

on the history of the judiciary and the educational system in New South Wales.

Interestingly, World War 1, which might have been expected to divert attention from the past, boosted the Society and its *Journal*. Only two parts appeared in 1915, but there were eight in 1916 and five in 1917 and 1918, making a total of twenty for the war period, as compared to twenty four in the preceding nine years. Most of the pre-war issues had been slim, totalling 588 pages by 1914, but over the next four years the number of pages grew to 1,038. To read their content is to gain virtually no idea that Australia was at war. Only one article, entitled 'History and Australian History' mentioned this subject. It was delivered by Peter Board, the Director of Education, who, influenced by the emotions aroused by Gallipoli, argued that, 'On 25 April history and Australian history were fused, and fused in a white heat'. Australia had hitherto been isolated from the world, but could never again be overlooked after proving its worth on the field of battle. Henceforth, Australia's voice must be heard in the councils of the empire and of the world.<sup>20</sup> With the exception of this stirring address, war-time readers of the *Journal*, found themselves immersed in the life of their colonial forbears. Perhaps this opportunity to escape from the grim realities of the present helps explain why the Society attracted a larger following.

One development of considerable importance to the *Journal* did, however, occur during the war years. In the final issue of 1916, G.A. Wood contributed an article entitled 'Ancient and Mediaeval Conceptions of Terra Australis'.<sup>21</sup> Two years later he tackled the question: 'Was Australia known in the 16th Century?'.<sup>22</sup> By now, Wood had become keen on maritime discovery and early New South Wales, and was also encouraging postgraduate research in Australian history. Already, in 1913, one of his former students, Karl Cramp, then a senior official in the Education Department and formerly foundation lecturer in history at Sydney Teachers College, had published an article on the constitutional development of New South Wales from

1848 to 1853. In 1917 he used oral sources and personal knowledge to record the circumstances underlying the formation of the Historical Society.<sup>23</sup> Here were indications that the *Journal* was beginning to attract professional historians. Another of their number, Meredith Atkinson, an Oxford graduate and Director of Tutorial Classes at Sydney University, presented a paper outlining significant themes in the economic history of early Australia. Instructive in themselves, such articles marked the beginning of a trend that gathered pace after the war.<sup>24</sup>

The 1920s and 1930s brought considerable gains to the Historical Society. In 1918 it received permission from the Crown to add the accolade Royal to its title. Earlier, it had won state government recognition in the form of a small grant. In 1915, the Department of Education made a lecture room available in its new building for the monthly lectures and throughout publicised the Society's activities in the *Education Gazette*.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, the Society was broadening its base and strengthening its links both with the community and the metropolitan press which publicised excursions, lectures and council elections. In this encouraging atmosphere membership grew, reaching 900 in 1927.<sup>26</sup> A decline occurred during the depression, but some ground had been regained by the eve of World War II when the total approached 810.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Society possessed greater human and financial resources than had been the case earlier. Council attracted new members, amongst them influential public figures whose presence raised its standing.

The Society's activities benefited further from the growth of community interest in the past. Local historical societies were established, first at Parramatta, then at Manly, Newcastle and in a small number of country districts. In Sydney, male descendants of the pioneers had formed the Australasian Pioneers' Club in 1910, while women followed suit in 1929 with the Women's Pioneer Society of Australasia. Specialist organisations were brought into being to cater

20 P. Board, 'History and Australian History', *JRAHS*, Vol. 3, pt. 6, 1914.

21 G.A. Wood, 'Ancient and Mediaeval Conceptions of Terra Australis', *JRAHS*, Vol. 3, pt. 10, 1916.

22 G.A. Wood, 'Was Australia Known in the 16th Century?', *JRAHS*, Vol. 4, pt. 4, 1918.

23 K.R. Cramp, 'The Australian Historical Society - The Story of its Foundation', *JRAHS*, Vol. 4, pt. 1, 1917.

24 M. Atkinson, 'Notes on the Early Economic History of Australia', *JRAHS*, Vol. 3, pt. 11, 1917; on Atkinson see ADB, Vol. 7.

25 *Sixteenth Annual Report, JRAHS*, p.3, Vol. 4, p.3.

26 *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report, JRAHS*, Vol. 13, pt. 7, 1927, p. 376.

27 *39th Annual Report, 1929, JRAHS*, Vol. 15, pt. 7, p. 546.

for the Jewish community, the Methodist church and railway enthusiasts. Membership of these groups partly overlapped with each other and with the Royal, but this was by no means always the case. More people became willing to give time to the study of Australian history giving rise to what the *Sydney Morning Herald* described as a heightened 'historical sense'.<sup>28</sup>

This phenomenon owed something to the patriotic fervour that marked the war and post-war years. Australia's past came to be more highly valued by a community that had matured and acquired a greater pride in its own attainments. Local and practical considerations were also involved. A variety of townships, institutions and organisations celebrated their jubilees, or centenaries, after 1918 creating publicity that drew further attention to the past. Important too, was the presence of the Mitchell Library which had opened in 1910. The original collection, generously bequeathed by David Scott Mitchell, was steadily enlarged by donation, purchase and the transcription of overseas material. After 1911 the Library became a repository for archival material which further enhanced its holdings. Such developments helped fulfil the dreams of the historian and transcriber, James Bonwick, who in the 1870s had looked forward to the day when Sydney would become the 'Mecca to which historical investigators would turn their eyes.'<sup>30</sup>

The availability of original material greatly excited G.A. Wood, giving further impetus to his own research and encouraging the expansion of his postgraduate programme. His successor, Professor S.H. Roberts, acclaimed at the time of his appointment in 1928, as a leading authority on Australian history, also promoted work in this field.<sup>31</sup> Roberts was a graduate of Melbourne University and the London School of Economics which serves as a reminder that the study of Australian history was by no means confined to Sydney. Roberts'

mentor, Professor Ernest Scott, greatly advanced this subject through his own writings. So too did Keith Hancock at Adelaide University, E.O.G. Shann at the University of Western Australia, A.C.V. Melbourne at Queensland University and R.C. Mills who became Professor of Economics at Sydney University. Such scholars belonged to a more scientific school of historians than had Wood and placed even greater emphasis on the importance of research training<sup>32</sup>

All of these developments had an important bearing on the *Journal* which underwent a number of changes after the war. A more liberal editorial policy resulted in the regular publication of 'a few judiciously selected original papers' additional to those delivered at the monthly meetings. In 1919, to meet the needs of a more sombre age, the floral edging around the cover was removed, leaving it free from embellishment. During the 1920s management was placed on a fresh basis. The Society's by-laws made no provision for the position of editor and initially work was carried out by a committee. Its original composition is unclear, although Frank Walker appears to have been involved.<sup>33</sup> Names were not mentioned until 1915 when the Annual Report thanked E.A. Ancher and C.H. Bertie for 'making themselves responsible in conjunction' with the President, C.T. Burfitt and the secretary, Captain J.H. Watson, for the 'periodic appearance' of the *Journal*.<sup>34</sup> Ancher worked for the *Star* newspaper and had particular interests in the history of Mosman, Bertie was the Sydney Municipal Librarian, Burfitt, descendant of a Dubbo pioneer wrote on the wool industry, while Watson was a leading retailer and handled the Society's research enquiries. In 1923 the Mitchell Librarian, Hugh Wright, took charge and was assisted when proof reading by J.F. Campbell, Alex Wilson and later G.H. Gifford.<sup>35</sup> Wright continued as editor until 1934 when he was replaced by the journalist E. Price Conigrave, who encouraged contributors to use reference notes and to type their articles, using double-spacing.<sup>36</sup>

28 Fletcher, *Australian History in New South Wales*, pp. 46 ff.

29 'The Historical Sense', *SMH*, 25 June 1930; also *SMH*, 12 October 1929, 26 December 1934.

30 Bonwick to Parkes, 19 September 1884, Parkes Correspondence, Vol. 49, (ML) A919 Bonwick to Parkes, 8 May 1885, Parkes Correspondence, Vol. 2 (ML) A872.

31 D.M. Schreuder 'A "Second Foundation": S.H. Roberts as Challis Professor of History 1929-47', *Centenary Reflections*, pp. 27 ff; D.R.V. Wood, *Stephen Henry Roberts*, Maryborough, 1986.

32 B.H. Fletcher, 'Australian History', in *History at Sydney*, p. 160.

33 M. Jacobs, "Students of a Like Hobby", *JRAHS.*, Vol. 73, pt. 4, April 1988, p. 251.

34 *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1915, p. 9; Ancher was described in the Obituary that appeared in the Annual Report, 1936, as having 'acted as Editor for the publication of the early numbers of the *Journal*', *JRAHS.*, Vol. 22, pt. 7, p. 457.

35 *Twenty-third Annual Report*, 1923, *JRAHS.*, Vol. 9, pt. 7, p. 340.

36 *34th Annual Report*, 1934, *JRAHS.*, Vol. 20, pt. 7, 1934, p. 429; *35th Annual Report*, *JRAHS.*, Vol. 21, pt. 7, p. 422.

Reference notes had already appeared somewhat erratically in the 1920s, providing evidence of growing familiarity with a widening range of primary sources. In this, as well as in the following decade, historical enthusiasts were clearly captivated by the opportunities for historical research that followed the opening of the Mitchell Library and the publication of the *Historical Records*. To read the articles that appeared throughout the inter-war years is to be struck by the excitement and wonderment that gripped those who were drawn to the unfolding records of the past. New information was constantly coming to the fore, gaps in knowledge could be filled and longstanding views challenged. Documents were often open to differing interpretations, generating lively debate about contentious issues. The prospect of engaging in such an exciting pastime attracted a widening group of authors. Some produced no more than a single article arising out of a specific interest. Others having tasted the delights of historical enquiry made a substantial contribution to the *Journal*.

Among this last group were Henry Selkirk and J.F. Campbell, both renowned as local historians.<sup>37</sup> They were followed by another Lands Department official, B.T. Dowd, who, between the 1930s and the 1960s, produced a steady outflow of articles. The 1930s also saw the appearance of James Jervis, the school teacher whose passion for local history had been aroused while on country service and W.L. Havard, who was sometimes assisted by his wife, Olive, a contributor in her own right.<sup>38</sup> Local history, land settlement and the beginnings of rural industry were among the main subjects of interest. Attention did, however, turn to other fields of endeavour. J.A. Ferguson, the noted barrister and Industrial Commission Judge, wrote articles both

37 Obituary of Henry Selkirk, *SMH*, 24 June 1930; J.F. Atchison, 'J.F. Campbell, A Gifted Observer of New England', *Armistide and District Historical Society Journal*, No. 23, pp. 113-137; *ADB*, Vol. 7.

38 W. Foster, 'Obituary Bernard Thomas Dowd', *JRAHS*, Vol. 64, pt. 3, December 1978; J. McClymont, 'A Short Biography of James Jervis and a Bibliography of His Historical Writings', Typescript, Parramatta Historical Society; R. Else-Mitchell, *Ward Havard, The Man and His Work*, Ward Havard Memorial Lecture, 9 August 1969, copy in Macquarie University Library; D.I. McDonald, 'Ward Havard and the Royal Australian Historical Society', *Canberra Historical Journal*, New Series, No. 11, March 1983.

on the radical Edward Smith Hall and the evangelical Samuel Marsden, besides revealing his exceptional talents as a bibliographer.<sup>39</sup> William Dixon, second only to David Scott Mitchell as a benefactor to the Public Library, wrote a series of articles on early artists.<sup>40</sup> A collector of art, he was also well-informed about maritime exploration, a subject that attracted contributors such as Francis Bayldon the master mariner, George Collingridge the artist and historian and G. A. Wood.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, the *Journal* was attracting well-known and highly respected figures. Two others who deserve mention were Charles Brunson Fletcher, editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* from 1918 until 1937 and C.E.W. Bean, the celebrated war correspondent.<sup>42</sup> Fletcher dealt with Pacific affairs, Bean, inter alia, with the writing of the official war histories and the Australian character which he saw as having been shaped by the bush. The skills learned in the outback and the continuing battle against the elements, developed traits that brought Australian troops to the fore and enabled them to withstand the rigours of war.

Representatives of practically every profession wrote for the *Journal* which also attracted an increased proportion of academics. S.H. Roberts, who had contributed substantially to the *Victorian Historical Magazine*, submitted only one article to the *Journal*, for his attention had been drawn to power politics and the issues underlying the growing international crisis.<sup>43</sup> Some of his students published articles during the 1930s, but not to the extent that had earlier been true

39 G.D. Richardson, 'Sir John Ferguson and Australian Bibliography', *Australian Library Journal*, November 1969; G.D. Richardson, 'The Instruction and Good of His Country: Sir John Ferguson, Libraries and the Historical Record', *JRAHS*, Vol. 62, pt. 2, 1976.

40 *ADB*, Vol. 8.

41 Fletcher, *Australian History in New South Wales*, pp. 143-146.

42 On Fletcher see *ADB*, Vol. 8; his articles included 'Australia and the Pacific 1788-1885', 'George Brown and the Pacific', *JRAHS*, Vol. 28, pt. 3, 1943, Vol. 7, pt. 1, 1921; for Bean see *ADB*, Vol. 7. K.S. Inglis, *C.E.W. Bean, Australian Historian*, Brisbane, 1970; A.W. Bayley, 'C.E.W. Bean', *Historical Studies*, No. 53, October 1969. His articles included 'Writing of the Australian Official History of the Great War - Sources, methods and some conclusions', 'Sidelights of the war on Australian character', *JRAHS*, Vol. 24, pt. 2, 1938, Vol. 13, pt. 4, 1927.

43 S.H. Roberts, 'Australian Wool-trade in the 'forties', *JRAHS*, Vol. 17, pt. 6, 1931.

of Wood's postgraduates. Wood himself used the *Journal* as an outlet for chapters of his manuscript dealing with early New South Wales. Most significant, as a lasting contribution to historical debate, was his analysis of the background of the founding convicts whom he saw more as the victims of society than its enemies. Fourteen of his students contributed to the *Journal*, prominent among them P.R. Cole, C.H. Currey and H.L. Harris, all of Sydney Teachers College, James Dennis and Karl Cramp both school inspectors and L.N. Rose, History Master at Fort Street Boys High School.<sup>44</sup> Wood's eldest son, Fred, who distinguished himself as an historian in New Zealand, wrote for the *Journal* and so too did five of Wood's female students including Myra Willard, author of the first scholarly book on the White Australia policy and Persia Campbell, later noted as an academic in the United States.<sup>45</sup> Most of the articles written by these scholars were based on their Master's theses. Together they spanned a lengthy period and covered a diversity of fields ranging from the early governors to more topical issues such as nationalism and national character.

Sydney University historians were not the only academics to make the *Journal* their forum. Professor A.P. Elkin, the clergyman and anthropologist, wrote on the Church of England in the Hunter river district, H.M. Green, the Fisher Librarian and authority on Australian literature, examined the oratory of William Charles Wentworth.<sup>46</sup> L.F. Fitzhardinge, a classicist as well as an historian of Australia, wrote about the portrait of the explorer Allan Cunningham, while Professor Ernest Scott traced the fortunes of the convicts sent from Canada in 1839 and of the explorers Hume and Hovell and La Perouse.<sup>47</sup> F.A. Bland, later Professor of Public Administration at Sydney University, dealt with the history of public administration,<sup>48</sup>

while the celebrated Roman Catholic priest, Eris O'Brien, the leading authority on the foundation both of Australia and of his church, analysed the public activities of Cardinal Moran.<sup>49</sup> The constitutional historian A.C.V. Melbourne, reviewed Australian relations with New Guinea, R.C. Mills wrote on Edward Gibbon Wakefield, while George Mackaness, head of the English Department at Sydney Teachers College, published seven papers reflecting the range of his interests as a biographer, bibliographer and literary critic.<sup>50</sup>

By 1939 the *Journal* stood out as the leading publication of its kind in Australia. Historical societies had been established in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, but although all produced journals none were on a scale comparable to that of the Royal.<sup>51</sup> S.H. Roberts paid tribute to what had been accomplished when speaking at the opening of the newly-acquired History House in February 1941. 'No student of the early days of Australian development', he observed, 'could cover his ground without working in detail on the heterogeneous, but amazingly inclusive, series of papers in the *Journal*'. He described how he directed postgraduates to its pages so as 'to find out what had been previously done, and in order to cull those parts of earlier work which may suit' their purposes. He was gratified to find that they were rarely disappointed and praised the Society for having assembled 'the greatest body of preliminary research in Australia'. This accomplishment formed an 'indispensable pre-requisite of the more generalised and synthesised histories of Australia' that were much needed.<sup>52</sup>

Roberts stressed that he did not intend the words 'preliminary' and 'pre-requisite' to imply criticism. Nevertheless they did denote a methodology that was less than adequate and an achievement that fell short of what was needed. There was much to justify such an appraisal.

44 B.H. Fletcher, 'History at Sydney Teachers' College 1906-1939', *JRAHS*, Vol. 76, pt. 3, December 1990, pp. 199ff.

45 On Willard see Education Subject File 1931, AONSW 20/12669; M. Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy*, Melbourne, 1923; on Campbell see *Notable American Women. The Modern Period*, Vol. 4, Cambridge, Mass., 1980.

46 On Elkin see T. Wise, *Self made Anthropologist: a life of A.P. Elkin*, Sydney, 1985; on H.M. Green see *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. W.H. Wilde et al., Melbourne, 1985, p. 306.

47 On Scott see *ADB*, Vol. 11.

48 On Bland see *Who's Who in Australia, 1962*, Melbourne 1962.

49 'Obituary Eris Michael O'Brien', *Historical Studies*, April 1976, p. 130.

50 On Melbourne and Mills see *ADB*, Vol. 10, on Mackaness see G. Mackaness, *Papers 1934-52 (ML) Mss 2374/4*, also De Berg, *Tapes: interview with G. Mackaness (NLA)*.

51 Greig, 'Origin of Historical Society of Victoria'; *Western Australian Historical Society, Journal and Proceedings*, Vol. 1, 1927, pt. 1; *Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, Vol. 1, August 1914, No. 1.

52 History House Official Opening, *JRAHS*, Vol. 27, pt. 1, pp. 7-10; see also earlier praise by W.F.W. in an article 'The Historical Sense. Our Debt to the Royal Australian Historical Society', *SMH*, 26 December 1934.

Despite the increased involvement of trained historians, the *Journal* was still mainly the preserve of enthusiastic amateurs. They were adept at locating documents, placing them in an ordered sequence and producing informative, colourful and highly readable narratives. Their articles had progressively improved as additional material became available and as speakers became more skilled in the techniques of research and more accustomed to preparing their papers for publication. The overall quality of writing was advanced significantly after 1914 thus raising the standard of the *Journal*. Yet many contributors possessed somewhat limited powers of analysis and they often inadequately related what they were writing to the broader historical background. They focussed on the particular rather than the general and although their writings were less antiquarian in flavour than had initially been the case, they were sometimes unduly provincial.

The *Journal* also possessed other characteristics that deserve mention. History, as seen in its pages, was the story of progress, brought about by men of action such as governors, pastoralists, explorers and business entrepreneurs. The part played by ideas in shaping the past was of little interest and in common with the historical profession as a whole, contributors largely ignored the existence of women. In addition, theirs was a white-centered view that trivialised the Aboriginal people and dismissed them as backward and irrelevant to the mainstream of Australian history. Underlying much of the writing was a pride in the British heritage, mainly as embodied in the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon tradition. Authors revealed a strong attachment to their own country, whose past they were anxious to record accurately and fully. Yet they also saw Australia not as an independent entity but as forming an integral part of Britain and the wider empire. This gave further dimensions to Australian history which gained from being viewed within a British context. In all of these ways, as well as in its uncritical acceptance of the existing structure of Australian society, the *Journal* mirrored attitudes that prevailed among the middle class. From this standpoint it can be seen as a conservative force which acted to confirm prevailing stereotypes by vesting them with sanctions drawn from the past.

The second world war interrupted the momentum built up since 1914 and inaugurated an era of some uncertainty. Admittedly there were a number of significant developments. In late 1939 the *Journal* became the focus of controversy when the President, K.R. Cramp, held back an issue containing the Annual Report which referred to Council as 'a citadel of complacency'. At the request of a group of councillors

and members who objected to Cramp's action and who thought Council was in need of reform, Rae Else-Mitchell, later a Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and of the Land and Valuation Court, and President of the Royal Australian Historical Society, prepared a requisition for a general meeting on 22 August 1939. The outcome was a setback for Cramp, who did not again serve as President, and a victory for the reformers who broadened the basis of Council and its committees.<sup>53</sup> An important principle had thus been established and never again was any attempt made to censor the *Journal* or to influence its content.

Despite the pressures of war, publication continued at the normal rate thanks partly to stalwarts such as James Jervis, Sir William Dixon, B.T. Dowd, the Havards and Karl Cramp, one of whose papers, examining American-Australian co-operation in the sphere of food supply, was unusual in dealing with a war-time issue. R. Else-Mitchell, produced the first three of a succession of important articles, while a number of G.A. Wood's former students, in addition to Cramp, also remained productive. They included Charles Currey, Dorothy Cubis and Helen Heney both literary figures, and John Metcalfe the Public Librarian.<sup>54</sup> W.D. Borrie, the distinguished demographer, wrote on immigration to New Zealand, while Gordon Greenwood, one of Roberts' students and later Professor of History at the University of Queensland, dealt with early Australian-American relations. Interesting too, in the context of the present day, was Ernest Scott's posthumous article examining the concept of Terra Nullius.<sup>55</sup>

Against these positive signs must be balanced indications that

53 I am most grateful to Mr Justice Rae Else-Mitchell for drawing my attention to these developments and for generously giving me information about them. For a report of the special meeting see *SMH*, 23 August 1939.

54 On Currey see *ADB*, Vol. 13, also J.M. Ward, 'Charles Herbert Currey', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 55, October 1970; 1973 De Berg tapes interview with Dorothy Cubis (ANL); some of Helen Heney's papers are in the Mitchell Library; for John Metcalfe see *Who's Who in Australia, 1962*, W. Boyd Rayward, 'Central and other mysteries in librarianship: the writings of John Wallace Metcalfe', *The Australian, Library Journal*, Vol. 36, no. 4, November 1987, p. 208.

55 E. Scott, 'Taking Possession of Australia - the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* (No Man's Land)', *JRAHS*, Vol. 26, 1940, pt. 1, p.1.



the war affected the *Journal* adversely. Additional burdens were imposed on the editor, E. Price Conigrave who, in 1941 became full-time General Secretary in addition to being Curator of History House and Organiser of Excursions.<sup>56</sup> Although he maintained the normal flow of *Journals* he was forced to reduce the size from 524 pages in 1940 and to 408 in 1945. At the close of the war, publication was delayed by a paper shortage and throughout there were fewer articles, some issues containing only two, while one issue was the product virtually of a single author. Olive Havard's valuable reproduction of the journal of Mrs Felton Matthews occupied nearly a quarter of all six parts that appeared in 1943. Clearly it had become impossible to maintain the *Journal* at the pre-war level.

Following the end of hostilities, attempts were made to reverse this decline. In 1948 the President, Dr George Mackaness, brought before Council a Long Range Plan dealing with the future of the Society. Included in his proposals were suggestions for revivifying the *Journal* which he thought should be issued quarterly, instead of every two months, with each number containing 120 pages. He sought to feature reviews of new books, to include a section devoted to Notes and Queries, and to incorporate an annual supplement, prepared by an Historical Research Committee, containing questions and answers on historical issues. He also sought periodically to provide surveys of historical literature designed to keep readers informed of current developments and to uncover gaps that needed filling. Finally he urged that the consolidated index covering the first twenty volumes and prepared by Sir William Dixson and James Dennis be brought up to date.<sup>57</sup> After discussing these matters, Council decided that a new index would be too costly and it also rejected the idea of a quarterly journal, opting instead for the existing six issues. Each was to be of sixty four pages although the size could be increased to eighty pages when finances permitted. Some immediate improvements were,

however, accepted including the idea of regular book reviews, bibliographical surveys and notes and queries.

These changes did not produce an immediate upward movement. By the early 1950s the *Journal* had failed to regain its lost ground even though it continued to attract new contributors, among them established Sydney University scholars such as S.J. Butlin, the Professor of Economics, J.M. Ward the new Challis Professor of History, and Tom Kewley the authority on social welfare. Paul Hasluck M.P., the future Governor-General, drew on personal experiences in two historically important articles dealing with Australia's role in the formation of the United Nations.<sup>58</sup> Younger rising scholars such as Bruce Mansfield and Allan Martin, N.O.P. Pyke and Douglas MacCallum also made their appearance. The quality of the *Journal* remained high, but financial difficulties, brought about in part by a drop in membership, kept it small. Industrial disturbances and blackouts in the strike-ridden years from 1949 to 1951 upset the publishing programme and created delays. In the early 1950s internal disputes within a Council that was thought by some to need urgent rejuvenation, added to the sense of malaise. Matters came to a head in the elections of 1954 when a ticket was run by Malcolm Ellis.<sup>59</sup> At his instigation one of the new members, A.G.L. Shaw, then a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sydney, was appointed *Journal* editor<sup>60</sup>, following a decision to separate the post from that of General Secretary.

Alan Shaw was the first professionally trained historian to edit the *Journal* and his appointment proved a turning-point in its history. A graduate of Melbourne and Oxford universities, he was one of Australia's leading historians and had numerous contacts with historical societies. Highly approachable and a popular speaker he was well-equipped to place the *Journal* on a stronger footing. While willing to accept contributions from a range of authors, he sought to develop higher standards and offered particular encouragement to university staff and postgraduate students. His editorship lasted until 1964 when he returned to Melbourne to occupy the Chair of History at Monash

56 41st Annual Report, 1941, *JRAHS*, Vol. 27, pt. 7, p.317

57 48th Annual Report, 1948, *JRAHS*, Vol. 34, pt. 7, pp. 18-19; from the outset it had been decided to provide an annual index. The general index to Volume 1 appeared in 1910 (Annual Report p.45) and thereafter it was prepared regularly. A consolidated index covering Vols. 1-20, compiled by William Dixson and edited by J. Dennis, was published in 1935: this was brought up to date in 1958 and again in 1984.

58 P. Hasluck, 'Australia and the Foundation of the United Nations - some personal reminiscences', *JRAHS*, Vols 40, pt. 3, 1954; Vol. 41, pt. 5, 1955.

59 M.H. Ellis, *Papers* (ML) K 21890

60 Annual Report 1964, *JRAHS*, Vol. 50, pt. 7, p.3.

University. The policies he had introduced, however, continued to guide his successors, all of whom had Sydney University connections. Dr Hazel King began her long and distinguished term as co-editor in 1964, assisted until 1967 by Ken Cable and also for a time by the University archivist, David Macmillan. In 1968 Brian Fletcher, then at the University of New South Wales, commenced duties. Following Hazel King's retirement in 1991 Dr Stephen Garton joined Dr Geoffrey Sherington who had been involved with the *Journal* since 1982, initially as Review Editor.

These appointments were made by Council which continued to have overriding responsibility for the *Journal* and to make policy decisions. To commemorate the fiftieth volume and to ensure that it kept abreast of other historical journals, a slightly larger format was adopted in 1964. Improvements were made to lay-out and binding and the cover was re-designed.<sup>61</sup> One important change was to drop the words 'and proceedings' from the title thus giving the editors greater latitude in their selection of articles. For some time past a range of articles had been accepted in addition to those originally delivered as papers at the monthly meetings. Such a practice continued to be followed and in the coming years a high proportion of articles fell into the first of these two categories. Some were written by non-members, a fact which occasioned discussion and led to efforts to encourage all contributors to join the Society. To have excluded from the *Journal* authors who were unwilling to follow such a course, however, was considered undesirable since it threatened to prevent the publication of important work.

In the years after 1964 other changes also occurred. In 1984 the list of contents was removed from the cover and replaced by a picture, initially of History House, but after June 1992 of a scene that varied with, and was related to, the content of each issue. In June 1982 D.S. Ford Pty. Ltd., was replaced as printer in a move made historic by the fact that this firm had been associated with the *Journal* since its inception and had even imported for its use a special metal font. Competition was growing and technology advancing. Price was valued more highly than sentiment and over the next few years, in an

effort to contain costs, new quotes were obtained annually and resort was had to a succession of firms, until the Society acquired its own word processor. Advances in technology enabled maps and illustrations, which had been dropped in the 1960s when they proved too expensive, to be reproduced. It also eventually became possible to re-introduce the long-abandoned practice of placing footnotes at the bottom of each page instead of at the end of articles. All but the last two of these steps were taken by Council after consultation with the editors who were given a free hand on other matters. It was they who received articles, sought appropriate advice about them, and determined the form and content of each issue. This arrangement worked well. It insulated day-by-day operations from Council business, brought stability to management and ensured that the *Journal* appeared regularly, even in periods when the Society was plagued by dissent.

Such periods were, fortunately, rare and from the 1960s until the early 1980s the Society experienced a period of stability in which significant growth occurred. The *Journal* benefited from these developments and made substantial headway. The fact that it was now run by university based historians meant that it was well-placed to capitalise on the great expansion in teaching and research that followed the decision of the Menzies government to fund universities. Existing History Departments expanded and new ones were founded. Australian history, once regarded with scepticism, became more popular following the emergence of a younger generation that was less attached to the British heritage and more anxious to understand how their own country had been shaped. Undergraduate courses and research projects proliferated bringing about a fresh phase in the development of Australian historiography. Increasing numbers of historians, drawn initially from the universities, but after the early 1970s from the Colleges of Advanced Education, published in the *Journal*, giving it a more academic character. Some of the Society's members took exception to this trend and complained that too many articles fell outside their sphere of interest.<sup>62</sup> A questionnaire held in the early 1980s, however, showed strong, although by no means unanimous support for what was occurring. Moreover, critics overlooked one

61. For general background see H. King, 'The Royal Australian Historical Society Part 11. Growth and Change: the Society 1955-1985', *JRAHS*, Vol. 73, pt. 4, April 1988, pp. 267-276.

62. D.I. McDonald, 'Sixty Years of Scholarship: the Journal of the Society 1906-1966', *JRAHS*, Vol. 52, pt. 1, March 1966; D.I. McDonald, 'Ward Havad', *Canberra Historical Journal*, March 1983, p. 32.

matter of crucial importance. In pre-war days, societies like the Royal had played a leading role in advancing the study of Australian history. Now the universities had seized the initiative and this was something that needed to be taken into account in editorial planning. It was essential for the *Journal* to catch the academic wave if it was to have any chance of retaining a standing in the rapidly changing world of historical research. New directions had to be taken if the *Journal* was to avoid becoming a backwater of outmoded approaches and ideas.

But how successful was the *Journal* in coping with this challenge? Such a question is best tackled by looking first at the changes which took place in academic writing as a whole. The 1950s and 1960s were noted less for radical innovations than for a more sophisticated analysis of established themes. These decades were dominated by scholars trained by the school of empirical historians that had come to the fore in pre-war years. They appreciated the importance of the imperial connection and stressed the need to view Australia's past in the context of British and imperial history. Their concern was mainly with the political determinants of change and they brought highly developed research skills to bear on policy-making, institutional change and the role of leaders at the federal and state levels. Whereas earlier the focus had been on the era before the end of the gold rushes, now there were forays into the last four decades of the nineteenth century and a more pronounced move into the twentieth century. By the late 1960s Australian history was being covered more comprehensively than ever before, but the prevailing methodology, varied more in degree than kind from one historian to another. Although there were some Marxist historians of significance they did not seriously challenge the dominance of the empiricists.

The whole situation, changed during the 1970s and the 1980s as Australian society became more diffuse, more questioning and less certain of itself. Historical research reflected both these shifts and the emergence of new attitudes towards poverty, race and gender. The younger generation of historians, influenced to a greater extent than their predecessors by the social sciences, such as anthropology and sociology, broke with earlier conventions. They brought to bear on their subject new methodologies that had developed overseas and new interests that were influenced by the social changes then occurring in Australia. Politically they moved to the left, switching attention from the governing to the governed and viewing the past from below rather than above. At the same time, there was a tendency for historical studies to become sectionalised as specialisation increased and particular

interest groups were formed. The frontiers of the past were pushed forward on a wide front, but alongside this went disagreement and debate, accompanied by a measure of intolerance, particularly towards the empiricists who were misleadingly dismissed as old-fashioned.<sup>63</sup>

How then, did these developments impinge on the *Journal*? After the late 1950s, articles ranged over a longer period than was the case earlier and focused somewhat less on New South Wales, thus justifying the use of the word 'Australian' to a greater extent than previously. The *Journal* moved further into the national domain and its scope broadened to include areas important to historians in other states. Themes such as urbanisation, race relations, religious history, medical history and public health, that are being explored elsewhere in Australia and overseas, have all been featured, thus reducing the insularity that once marked so many articles. At the same time, a place has been found for the earlier and still prevailing interest in biography, political history and local history, although to a large extent these fields have been the subject of more scholarly analysis. From all this a less celebratory and more balanced view of the past emerged. There was also a diminished tendency to view Australian history as an extension of that of Britain and a greater willingness to focus on what was indigenous to Australia.

To this extent the *Journal* has kept pace with advances in historical writing. Yet it also continues to blend the old with the new. Despite a shift towards professional historians it still attracts non-professionals. Indeed, it was no part of editorial policy to discourage such enthusiasts, for to do so would be to ignore another major development that has occurred since the 1950s. This period witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the number of local and family historical societies. The genealogical movement gathered pace throughout Australia and so too did the study of regional history. In its own way this was as important as the advances in university-based research, for it represented an upsurge of community interest in the past. Some writers who were involved in this process have continued to contribute to the *Journal*. That more failed to do so reflected in part the availability of other outlets resulting from the new-found capacity of local

63 For a general survey see S. Macintyre, 'The Writing of Australian History', also Ann Curthoys, 'Into History', *Australians A Historical Library: Australians from 1939*, Adelaide, 1986, pp. 439 ff.

bodies, particularly since word processors have become available, to undertake publishing programmes. The *Newsletter* of the Royal, expanded from the *Monthly Notes* in 1962 and converted into the magazine *History*, in 1989, also attracted historians of this kind. At the same time, their writings for the *Journal*, although fewer, have remained of considerable significance, and have been a great source of strength.

The *Journal*, therefore, by no means completely broke with its past. It succeeded in retaining its earlier eclectic flavour, but at the same time managed to fashion a niche of its own in the world of historical journals. An increased proportion of articles were the equal of those that appeared in more specifically academic publications. Yet the *Journal* could not seek to imitate these publications, or to follow them into some of the newer and more esoteric areas of history. To do so would be to run the risk of alienating a membership whose interests the *Journal* had been founded to serve. Nor could the *Journal* aim at the degree of specialisation attained by publications such as *Labour History*, or the *Journal of Religious History*. Rather it endeavoured, while maintaining the learned image that had been sought from the outset, to cater for as wide a range of interests as possible. It thus came to occupy a middle ground which inevitably created problems. Those whose pleasures derive, quite legitimately, from a species of narrative centered on the particular rather than the general, found less of appeal in its pages. Nor could one expect the *Journal* to attract those who view historical writing as an exercise in class or gender power. The views of the deconstructionists and the theoreticians have not touched the *Journal* to any extent. Neither have the opinions of those who, whether from an Aboriginal or a multicultural perspective, tend to be dismissive of the era in which British influence was at its peak. Despite, or perhaps because of this, the *Journal* continued to arouse considerable interest and attention. In recent years the measurers have devised a new criterion for evaluating what they regard as merit. This is citation referencing which makes value judgements based on the number of times a book or article appears in the footnotes or bibliographies of scholarly publications. Since this is oriented towards the northern hemisphere one would not expect the *Journal* to feature. Using Australian publications and university essay lists as a guide, however, it could safely be claimed that the *Journal* continues to be widely used for reference, general and specialist purposes.

For close to ninety years, therefore, the *Journal* has played an important role in the life of the community and that of the Society.

Without its *Journal* the influence of the Society would have been confined to those living sufficiently close to Sydney to attend functions. With the *Journal* the Society has been able to exceed its founders' hopes in reaching not only across Australia but even overseas. If such gains are to be preserved, the *Journal* needs to remain more than a localised publication, to serve as wide a range of interests as possible and to maintain high standards. These are formidable requirements that need to be constantly related to the changes that are occurring in the community and in the study of Australian history. When the *Journal* first appeared, Australia was little more than a century old and was just emerging from the colonial era. Now there is nearly an additional century of history, national as well as state, to be covered. The British heritage is no longer the only one to deserve attention for there exists a multiplicity of ethnic groups, each with its own past. Superimposed on this is a younger, local-born generation whose attachment to Australia grows steadily stronger. Account must also be taken of the Aboriginal people for whom Australian history began, not in 1788, but some 60,000 years ago. Their emergence places the past in a new perspective, and has introduced an alternative view of history based on the handing down of tradition by oral means, rather than the critical evaluation of written sources. If the *Journal* is to continue widening its community links account will need to be taken of these developments. Fortunately, the history of the *Journal*, has been one of adaptability and growth. Provided Council continues to offer the kind of support that has hitherto been given there is every hope of this trend continuing. Certainly, it is vital that this should be so for, just as the *Journal* has the capacity to enhance the standing of the Society, so too does it possess the potential to lessen its reputation and narrow its membership.

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