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Stuart Macintyre has been the Ernest Scott Professor of History at the University of Melbourne since 1990 and is a former president of the Australian Historical Association. His books include *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4* (1986), *A Colonial Liberalism* (1991), *A History for a Nation* (1994) and *The History Wars* (2003). He is the President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73593-3 - A Concise History of Australia, Third Edition

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521516082

© Stuart Macintyre 2009

First published 2009

Cover design by David Thomas Design
 Typeset by Aptara
 Printed in China by Printplus

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data

Macintyre, Stuart, 1947–
 A concise history of Australia / Stuart Macintyre
 3rd ed.

9780521516082 (hbk.)

9780521735933 (pbk.).

Includes index.

Bibliography

Aboriginal Australians – History.

Republicanism – Australia.

Australia – History.

Australia – Politics and government.

Australia – Environmental conditions

994

ISBN 978-0-521-51608-2 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-73593-3 paperback

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Cambridge University Press

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For my daughters
MARY AND JESSIE
this is also their history

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A concise history is necessarily dependent on a very large body of historical scholarship, and Australian historians will see the extent of my reliance on their work. Geoffrey Bolton, Verity Burgmann, Joy Damousi, Patricia Grimshaw, John Hirst, Jill Roe, John Morton, Peter Nicholson, Tim Rowse and Patrick Wolfe aided the preparation of the original edition. Wayne Geerling, Jonathon Ritchie and Kim Torney provided research assistance; Diana Bell helped with illustrations. Rosa Brezac, Gabrielle Murphy, Martine Walsh and Lynne Wrout lightened my academic duties, the History Department at the University of Melbourne tolerated my absences and the Australian Research Council provided a grant that paid for them. I am grateful to Phillipa McGuinness, the commissioning editor of Cambridge University Press in Australia, for persuading me to write the book, and Janet Mackenzie, with whom I began my undergraduate studies, for editing it sympathetically.

In two revisions of the work I have modified some of the earlier chapters and largely rewritten Chapter Nine. Wayne Geerling helped me to gather additional material, and I benefited from the advice of Alan Atkinson, Peter Beilharz, Nicholas Brown, Andy Brown-May, Michael Clyne, Graeme Davison, Paula Hamilton, Marilyn Lake, Katharine Massam, Peter Matheson, Sean Scalmer, Zora Simic, Peter Spearritt and Tony Taylor, but this edition is marked also by the influence of many other friends and colleagues. I have learned from students I have taught and postgraduates whose research I have supervised; the chance to share my interests with undergraduates at Harvard as I began preparing the present edition was invaluable.

Acknowledgements

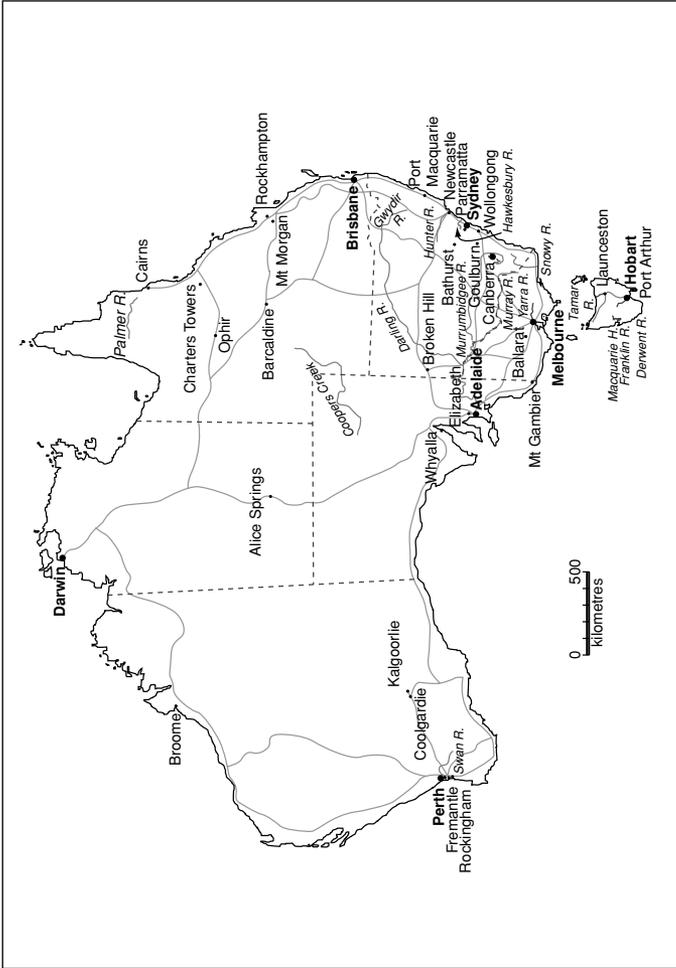
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A concise national history written for an international readership presents an opportunity and a challenge. The local reader looks for the familiar landmarks. The overseas reader, on the other hand, has little familiarity with them. A narrative history composed of the standard fare is unlikely to explain Australia to those who do not bring some prior knowledge to it; a roll-call of names will be of little assistance to those who have not encountered them before. I have endeavoured to assume little, and to paint a broad-brush picture in which the detail is subordinated to the characteristic features.

That in itself is hazardous. Specialists will scrutinise the text for inclusion of their concerns. Those who feel strongly about particular causes will take the amount of attention accorded them as an index of sympathies. Such weighing of proportions is inevitable and I am aware that my emphases are indeed indicative of my own understanding and inclinations. My purpose, however, has been to present a narrative that explains why its component parts have a place in the national story, and how they continue to generate discussion. I have tried to set Australian history within the larger history of which it forms a part, and to draw out comparisons with other parts of the world. These intentions are meant to serve the overseas reader who might have seen an Australian film or glimpsed the natural history of this country on television but finds it infrequently reported in current affairs. In writing it I have in mind the visitor who encounters the landscape and local usages but finds their connecting logic difficult to decipher. I hope that it serves to connect what they see and hear with a more systematic account of how it came to be.

I dedicated the first edition of the book to my two daughters, born in England, raised in Australia, and now divided between Melbourne and Vancouver, who too often had their father play the pedagogue and all along were instructing him in their interests and concerns. Both then and subsequently I gained a better understanding of this exchange, as well as subjects beyond Australian history, from my wife, Martha.

Stuart Macintyre
September 2008



Map 1.1 Australia: the main rivers, cities and towns