Australia is the last continent to be settled by Europeans, but it also sustains a people and a culture tens of thousands years old. For much of the past 200 years the newcomers have sought to replace the old with the new. This book tells how they imposed themselves on the land, and describes how they brought technology, institutions and ideas to make it their own. It relates the advance from penal colony to a prosperous free nation and illustrates how, in a nation created by waves of newcomers, the search for binding traditions has long been frustrated by the feeling of rootlessness. Now, with the realisation that colonisation began with invasion, present-day Australians are more than ever before coming to terms with their past. This revised edition incorporates the most recent historical research and contemporary historical debates on frontier violence between European settlers and Aborigines and the Stolen Generations. It covers the Sydney Olympics, the refugee crisis and the ‘Pacific solution’. More than ever before, Australians draw on the past to understand their future.

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‘Macintyre’s book is the best short history of Australia since Manning Clark’s classic of 1963.’ – Times Literary Supplement

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) and A History for a Nation (1994), and more recently, The History Wars (2003). Since 1999 he has been Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne.
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For my daughters

MARY AND JESSIE

this is also their history
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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, and the local teacher expects the stock-in-trade of the subject to be assembled and labelled. The overseas reader, on the other hand, has little familiarity with these fixtures. 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. The specialists will scrutinise the text for acknowledgement 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 book to my two daughters, born in England, raised in Australia, who have too often had their father play the pedagogue and all along have been instructing him in their interests and concerns.

In revising the original edition I have modified some of the earlier chapters and made substantial changes to Chapter Nine. Wayne Geerling helped me to gather additional material, and I benefited from the advice of Alan Atkinson, Peter Beilharz, Andy Brown-May, Michael Clyne, Graeme Davison, Paula Hamilton, Katharine Massam, Peter Matheson and Peter Spearritt.

Stuart Macintyre
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