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978-1-107-45203-9 - The Cambridge History of Australia: Volume 2: Indigenous and Colonial Australia

Edited by Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

AUSTRALIA

*

VOLUME 2

The Commonwealth of Australia

Volume 2 of *The Cambridge History of Australia* covers the period 1901 to the present day. It begins with the first day of the twentieth century, which saw the birth of the Commonwealth of Australia. In Part I the fortunes of the new nation-state are traced over time: a narrative of national policies, from the initial endeavours to protect Australian living standards to the dismantling of protection, and from maintenance of the integrity of a white settler society to fashioning a diverse, multicultural one. These chapters relate how Australia responded to external challenges – the two world wars, the Depression of the 1930s, the loss of markets in the 1970s – and adapted to changing expectations.

Part II takes up particular themes for closer attention. It is here that some distinctive features of modern Australia are clarified: its enduring democracy and political stability, engagement with a unique environment, the means whereby Australians maintained prosperity, the treatment and aspirations of its Indigenous inhabitants. The changing patterns of social relations are examined, along with the forms of knowledge, religion, communication and creativity. Chapters on Australia's place in the world examine security, travel, the historical links to Britain and engagement with Asia and the Pacific.

ALISON BASHFORD is Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History, University of Cambridge.

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Praise for *The Cambridge History of Australia*

'*The Cambridge History of Australia* provides so much more than a chronology of events... here are two volumes filled with wisdom that will inform those who make the choices for the future... Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, in their work as editors, have brought together a diversity of intelligent voices and presented them in a consistent and engaging manner which invites us to pursue further reading. There is something for all of us: teachers, researchers, students and curious laymen who wish to engage in and celebrate our shared story.'

The Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, former
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

'This impressive work includes contributions from 67 historians, a veritable Who's Who of Australian history, and covers the nation's past from its earliest people to the ways we live now.'

Anna Clark, *Sydney Morning Herald*

'Lucid, balanced, innovative and comprehensive, this book shows Australian historians at their best. At a turning-point in the national experience, Australians have a right to expect such a book as this, a report card on the long-term progress of their country.'

Emeritus Professor Alan Atkinson

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[More information](#)*Abbreviations*

AAL	Australian Aborigines' League
AAPA	Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission (Corporation from 1983)
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACE	adult and community education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACM	Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy
ACTU	Australian (until 1947 Australasian) Council of Trade Unions
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AIIA	Australian Institute of International Affairs
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANA	Australian National Airways
ANU	Australian National University
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
ANZAM	Anglo–New Zealand–Australia–Malaya Area
ANZUS	Australian, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty
APA	Aborigines' Progressive Association
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARC	Australian Research Council
ARM	Australian Republican Movement
ARP	Air Raid Precaution
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ASIS	Australian Secret Intelligence Service
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AUSFTA	Australia–United States Free Trade Agreement
AWAS	Australian Women's Army Service
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation
CAE	college of advanced education

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Abbreviations

CAS	Contemporary Art Society
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEG	Civics Expert Group
CER	Closer Economic Relations
CLF	Commonwealth Literary Fund
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRTS	Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Company
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
EEC	European Economic Community
FCAA	Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement
FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GFC	global financial crisis
GNP	gross national product
GST	goods and services tax
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICT	information and communications technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
MFP	Multifunction Polis
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAC	National Aboriginal Conference
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NLA	National Library of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
P&O	Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PNG	Papua New Guinea
POW	prisoner-of-war
Qld	Queensland
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RSL	Returned and Services League

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Abbreviations

SA	South Australia
SAS	Special Air Service
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
TAA	Trans Australia Airlines
TAFE	technical and further education
Tas.	Tasmania
UAP	United Australia Party
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UQP	University of Queensland Press
UWA	University of Western Australia
VET	vocational education and training
Vic.	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WAAAF	Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WRANS	Women's Royal Australian Naval Service

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Map 0.1 Australia and the region

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Preface

The history of Australia is the past of a continent and a Commonwealth, of ancient and modern times, Indigenous people and settlers. The *Cambridge History of Australia* captures the expertise of 67 historians, across generations and fields of knowledge, to present a fresh account of the nation's past. Volume I, *Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, deals with Australia's history to 1901, when the colonies federated. The result of that Federation was the first new nation of the twentieth century. Volume II, *The Commonwealth of Australia*, encompasses Australian history as it has unfolded since 1901.

These volumes succeed a limited number of multi-authored antecedents, which form a telling historical sequence. On one view, the new *Cambridge History of Australia* follows the inter-war *Cambridge History of the British Empire*. Part 1 of Volume VII dealt with Australia, Part 2 with New Zealand. Formally adviser to the three British editors of the eight-volume series, Ernest Scott of the University of Melbourne commissioned chapters from the fledgling Australian historical profession to produce a history that revealed the successful British settlement of Australia and the growth of a country coming to appreciate 'the responsibilities as well as the privileges which nationhood involves'.¹ Published in 1933, the book was used widely for two decades.

It was succeeded in 1955 by a new collaborative history edited by Gordon Greenwood of the University of Queensland, which was sponsored by the committee responsible for celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Australian Commonwealth in 1951. Its title, *Australia: A Social and Political History*, signalled a reorientation away from the *Cambridge History's* emphasis on exploration, settlement and constitutional development, and towards the growth

¹ J. Holland Rose, A.P. Newton and E.A. Benians, with Ernest Scott (eds), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. VII, part 1, *Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 624.

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of a distinctive society. Greenwood assembled younger practitioners in the emergent field of Australian history with the expectation that they could guide the student and provide the 'layman' with 'an intelligent understanding of the development of his own society'.²

Greenwood's history passed through eleven printings before it was superseded in 1974 by *A New History of Australia*, edited by Frank Crowley.³ This, too, was organised in a sequence of periods chosen to 'highlight the significant events and turning points in Australia's development'; it was conceived as a general history, drawing on the substantial body of research produced in the previous decades to integrate social and economic history with government and politics. Both the Greenwood and Crowley volumes spoke to the mood of confidence in the post-war decades of rising prosperity and also to the growing diversity of Australian society.

The Australian volume of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* was reissued in 1988, with a new introduction by Geoffrey Bolton – published, if not always read, as a period piece. That was the Bicentenary year, 200 years after Governor Arthur Phillip came ashore from his First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788. It was not surprising that the once-authoritative Cambridge history attracted little attention during the appearance in this year of shelves of national, nationalist and anti-nationalist history writing. It had emphasised the British origins of a burgeoning nationhood, whereas in 1988 the Australian government wanted to celebrate a far more diverse nation and withheld support from a private re-enactment of the voyage of the First Fleet. The Bicentenary was marked by uncertainty over the place of Indigenous Australians in the national story and heated debate over the legacy of the past. Neither the Greenwood nor the Crowley volume served the new mood of self-questioning.

The direct antecedents to the new *Cambridge History of Australia* were the ambitious collaborative works of 1988. Much of the historical profession was drawn into the preparation of *Australians: A Historical Library*, by far the largest historical project then or since. It consisted of five multi-authored volumes that dealt with slices of Australian history at 50-year intervals: *Australians to 1788*, *Australians 1838, 1888, 1938* and *Australians after 1938*. It also comprised five reference volumes: an historical atlas, a dictionary, a chronology, a guide to sources and a volume of historical statistics. The 'slicing' methodology adopted for all but the first and last of the five non-reference

² Gordon Greenwood (ed.), *Australia: A Social and Political History* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955), p. v.

³ F.K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1974).

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volumes, in which a cross-section of Australian society in particular years could be considered deeply, was designed to counter the narrative organisation of prior histories and to draw specialist fields of scholarship into an integrated whole.

Australians: A Historical Library employed high production standards and made extensive use of illustrations and graphical devices, as well as paying close attention to accessible prose designed to reach a popular audience. Along with many other Bicentennial publications and an extensive program of commemorative events, it foregrounded the politics of history in a settler colonial nation and stimulated historical debate in public and scholarly forums. Australian public life has been all the better for it. History was brought to the notice of an audience both more inclusive and more engaged than Greenwood's 'laymen', and with an intensity that perhaps would have surprised the post-war generation. Two hundred years of British colonisation was an anniversary simultaneously celebrated, criticised and debated as 50 years of national Federation had not been.

That the past held new significance for the present was evident on the shores of Sydney Harbour, where Indigenous activists and supporters protested 'Australia Day' as 'Invasion Day' on 26 January 1988. It was also evident in the history profession as *Australians: A Historical Library* was countered by four volumes written and edited by dissident historians as *A People's History of Australia*.⁴ That was followed by a further collaborative endeavour of national reassessment, perhaps unique in the genre of national histories anywhere. *Creating a Nation* was written by four leading feminist historians as a new interpretation in which the entire national story was recast with gender to the fore.⁵ The 1988 volumes, the people's history and the feminist history were all responses to a lack of confidence in earlier sequential narratives.

First published in 2013, the *Cambridge History of Australia* has the virtue of not coinciding with any official commemoration. In 1813 Sydney's Blue Mountains were crossed by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth, a staple of an earlier national history, and in 1913 came the less-remembered naming of the new national capital of Canberra. But perhaps the key anniversary that marks this major venture in Australian collaborative history is its publication 25 years after the Bicentenary. It includes a number of eminent historians

4 Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *A People's History of Australia since 1788*. 4 vols: *Making a Life*; *Staining the Wattle*; *A Most Valuable Acquisition*; *Constructing a Culture* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1988).

5 Patricia Grimshaw, Ann McGrath, Marilyn Lake and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994).

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who played a prominent role in the Bicentennial ventures – but it involves more historians who were taught by them. It is thus a national history shaped by a new generation. It carries neither the celebration nor the stark critique of Australian nationalism that characterised the Bicentenary. It incorporates much of the postcolonial, cultural and feminist scholarship that has strongly shaped historical awareness, knowledge and methodology. At the same time, it has been conceived, discussed and written well after the cultural turn in history writing that privileged theory over investigative research, language over experience.

The histories edited by Greenwood and Crowley marked the growth of the Australian history profession and of Australian history as a field of research. Whereas the earlier *Cambridge History of the British Empire* contained chapters written by economists, lawyers, a geographer and a literary scholar, not all of them working in universities and several based overseas, the post-war histories relied almost entirely on the work being done in local history departments. That self-sufficiency allowed the contributors to delineate more confidently the stages of national development around which they organised their histories, and to highlight in their chapters the growing body of specialised research. Since then, however, the disciplinary boundaries have shifted as scholars working in cognate disciplines have turned to Australian history, historians have drawn on these disciplines in turn, and new fields of knowledge have emerged. While most of the contributors to this *Cambridge History of Australia* are historians, it includes chapters written by practitioners of archaeology, political science, economic, educational and literary history, environmental, gender and Indigenous studies. Part of its purpose is to bring these different ways of understanding the past into conversation.

The *Cambridge History of Australia* stands apart from previous collaborative works, in part because it is a national history written in global times. It is the work of a generation of historians for whom national history now means a combination of encounters located in time and place and the large-scale patterns that transcend national boundaries. While such a global outlook itself is not new – indeed, it is perhaps more longstanding in Australian history than elsewhere – it is now informed by new ways of exploring the relations between the global and the local. Australia's place in global history is reinterpreted after race, after Empire and after postcolonialism.

Part I of each volume of the *Cambridge History* presents Australia's history in a sequential summary of the important events and changes over stretches of time that range from one to two or three decades. Some decades have received concentrated attention, since they saw major turns or accelerations

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in Australia: the 1850s gold rush; the formative political and social developments of the 1890s; and 1939–49, bringing together Australia's involvement in World War 2 and the great post-war reconstruction, for example.

Part II of each volume cuts a different way. Recognising the limitations of telling a national history through a chronological narrative alone, it 'slices' Australian history, not vertically by time as in *Australians: A Historical Library*, but horizontally by theme. In these chapters contributors assess the whole period covered by that volume in the light of a particular aspect (such as religion), an historical phenomenon (such as environmental transformations), a particular category of analysis (such as gender) or a geographical dimension (for example, Australia and the Asia-Pacific region). It is in these chapters that change over time is most evident.

Such thematic interpretation of the past is one of the lasting effects of a robust critical tradition in Australian historiography. It stems from intellectual exchange with other disciplines, as well as transnational approaches to telling national stories. Australian history has been recast in the light of new comparative histories that locate it not just within the context of the British Empire, but also with respect to North American history, Chinese history and the history of the Pacific and Southeast Asia. In the process, core business in Australian history has been revised.

Authors have been asked to write beyond their own interpretative positions, to present and explain key trends and events, and, where debate has been significant, to explain to the reader the contours and implications of the changing historiography. There is no uniform voice, but there is consistency of scope and scale. None of these chapters are simply essays displaying an author's specialism. They are all more than that, and the list of further reading at the end of each volume directs the reader to the key works in the authors' fields. In addition to the design of each volume as a coherent whole, contributors had the opportunity to consider their own chapters in the light of the others, and to discuss questions of treatment, nomenclature and coverage.

Australian readers will recognise how strongly the past shapes the present, from the commemoration of wars fought on foreign soil to the 'history wars' fought over frontier violence; and from the recuperation of local history to the integration of migrant histories that graft onto Australian life the past of other places. The contributors have not shied from the contested nature of such uses of the past but neither have they allowed their own sympathies to prevail over the obligations of historical scholarship. International readers, untroubled by the fault lines of domestic sensibilities, will appreciate a treatment that attends to the distinctive features of Australian history.

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Edited by Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre

Frontmatter

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Preface

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