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978-1-107-56243-1 - A Concise History of Australia: Fourth Edition

Stuart Macintyre

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A Concise History of Australia

FOURTH EDITION

Australia is the last continent to be settled by Europeans, but it also sustains a people and a culture tens of thousands of years old. For much of the past 225 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 a penal colony to a prosperous free country and illustrates how, in a nation created by waves of newcomers, the search for binding traditions has long been accompanied by the feeling of rootlessness.

The fourth edition incorporates the far-reaching effects of an export and investment boom in the early years of the twenty-first century that lifted Australia to unprecedented prosperity. The sale of minerals and energy enabled the economy to withstand the global financial crisis of 2007–08 but there was no agreement on how the wealth was to be managed and its benefits distributed. The book describes a continuing search for solutions to climate change, the unauthorised arrival of refugees, Indigenous disadvantage and generational change.

Stuart Macintyre is an Emeritus Laureate Professor of the University of Melbourne. From 1999 to 2006 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and he has served as president of the Australian Historical Association and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. His books include *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4* (1986), *The History Wars* (2003) and, most recently, *Australia's Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s* (2015). With Alison Bashford he edited the *Cambridge History of Australia* (2013).

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*For my daughters
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is part of a series of national histories published for an international readership, and successive editions have been translated into a number of foreign languages. The opportunity to explain Australia and its history to non-Australians was compelling, though when the book first appeared I became aware of the contrasting expectations of Australian readers. They look for familiar events and actors for both orientation and reassurance that this is indeed an account of their past. The overseas reader, on the other hand, has little familiarity with such local lore, and a narrative composed of it is unlikely to assist those who do not hold any prior knowledge. In subsequent revisions I have therefore provided more of these signposts while endeavouring to paint a broadbrush picture in which the detail is subordinated to the distinctive features.

A similar quandary arises from the different uses of this book. Those using it as textbook to teach Australian history expect it to encompass the principal fields of research, while other readers who feel strongly about particular causes 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 in the context of global and regional history and to draw out comparisons with other parts of the world. This approach is

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intended to serve the overseas reader who perhaps has a mental image of the Australian landscape, its flora and fauna, but is dependent on a media coverage that sheds little light on the patterns of national life. I also have in mind the visitor who encounters the local practices but finds their logic difficult to follow. I hope the book assists these readers to understand what they see and hear by providing an account of how it came to be.

My predecessor as professor of history at the University of Melbourne wrote 100 years ago in his *Short History of Australia* that 'historical events, like mountain ranges, can best be surveyed as a whole by an observer who is placed at a good distance from them'. In preparing this edition I have taken the opportunity to look again at events that have now receded from the foreground and bring more clarity into the account of contemporary developments.

A concise history is necessarily dependent on a very large body of historical scholarship, and in earlier editions I acknowledged the assistance of many friends and colleagues. I have now accumulated so many layers of guidance that it would be invidious to attempt to list all my obligations. In preparing to write this edition I benefited particularly from working with Alison Bashford on the *Cambridge History of Australia* and the nearly seventy scholars who contributed chapters to it. As before, I have learned from the undergraduates I teach and the postgraduates with whom I work, not least for sharing the questions that exercise them and the approaches to Australian history that catch their imagination.

I dedicated the first edition of the book to my two daughters Mary and Jessie, born in England, raised in Australia, who too often had their father play the pedagogue and all along were instructing him in their interests and concerns. They now live in Vancouver and Melbourne, and their children, Xuan and Tai, Rory and Hamish, in turn give me additional insights into the interplay of then and now. My wife Martha always helps me gain a better understanding of these exchanges, as well as subjects beyond Australian history.

Stuart Macintyre

February 2015



Map 1.1 Australia: the main rivers, cities and towns