Stuart Macintyre, one of Australia’s most highly regarded historians, revisits A Concise History of Australia to provoke readers to reconsider Australia’s past and its relationship to the present. Integrating new scholarship with the historical record, the fifth edition of A Concise History of Australia brings together the long narrative of Australia’s First Nations’ peoples; the arrival of Europeans and the era of colonies, convicts, gold and free settlers; the foundation of a nation state; and the social, cultural, political and economic developments that created a modern Australia.

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, Macintyre’s Australia remains one of achievements and failures. So too the future possibilities are deeply rooted in the country’s past endeavours. A Concise History of Australia is an invitation to examine this past.

Stuart Macintyre is an Emeritus Laureate Professor of the University of Melbourne. He served as president of the Australian Historical Association and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and is currently chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria and president of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Among the forty books he has written or edited are The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4 (1986), The History Wars (2003), Australia’s Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s (2015) and the Cambridge History of Australia (2013) with Alison Bashford.
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Cambridge University Press acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia.

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We pay our respects to the First Nation Elders of Australia and New Zealand, past, present and emerging.
A Concise History of Australia

Fifth Edition

STUART MACINTYRE
For my daughters Mary and Jessie, their partners Phi and Aaron, and their children Xuan, Tai, Rory and Hamish.
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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 readers. The Australian reader looks 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 broad-brush picture in which the detail is subordinated to the distinctive features.

In keeping with the design of the series, I also dispensed originally with textual references and indicated the sources of quotations at the end of the volume. As the list of such sources grew in subsequent editions, it became more difficult for the reader to identify the relevant citation, so in this edition I have keyed it to the text with a pertinent phrase. Full documentation of the literature on which I have drawn would burden what is, by its nature, an overview; I have therefore restricted the references to the sources of quotations and some works that elucidate specific points of interest.

A similar quandary arises from the different uses of this book. Those using it as a 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
given to them as an index of sympathies. Such weighing of propor-
tions is inevitable, and I am aware that my emphases are indeed
indicative of my own understanding and inclinations. The purpose,
however, is to provide 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 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 Mel-
bourne 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
greater 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. As before, I have learned from those I have
taught here and overseas, as well as 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, 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. So too their partners and children give me additional
insights into the interplay of then and now.

Stuart Macintyre

*September 2019*