



W. K. HANCOCK

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W. K. Hancock, *Country and Calling*, London: Faber and Faber, 1954. Prologue and
Chapter I. This first volume of autobiography is a major source for much that follows too.

William Keith Hancock 1898–1988

KEITH HANCOCK was born in Melbourne, Australia, on 26 June 1898. His grandparents—100 per cent British he used to say—migrated from four different quarters of the British Isles ‘to booming boisterous Victoria in the eighteen fifties, the years of gold’. One grandfather prospered as the owner of a brickworks; the other, beginning life by running away to sea, became a successful building contractor. William, Hancock’s father, armed with a degree from Melbourne University, first set out to take charge of a country parish, ‘six hundred square miles of thinly farmed country in the flat north of Victoria’, and in due course became Archdeacon of Melbourne. Life (Hancock later enjoyed saying) began in Moonee Ponds. Along with two sisters and his two older brothers there was a great deal to enjoy in an often spartan household, particularly holidays with the grandparents in the delectable western district of Victoria; ‘the original and authentic *Australia Felix*, rich grasslands rolling away to the horizon’, he later called them.¹

None of this ever left him. He was the most distinguished scholar in the humanities and the social sciences to have been born and to have worked in Australia. He was just as capable of running away to sea as his grandfather had been; intellectually there was always something to be explored in the hills off to the side or across the flat to the front. He was steeped too in all that was meant by ‘marvellous Melbourne’, arguably in his boyhood days still the most prosperous city in the world for ordinary working people, intellectually alive with the Victorian liberalism of the antipodes, suffused by the sober values of British Christianity. His boyhood years gave him an intense involvement with the wondrously variegated Australian landscape, along with a deep sense of all it meant to be colonial; great pride in participating in the growth of a new nation, together with a persistent yearning to sup at the deeper waters of the civilization from which his inheritance derived.

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¹ W. K. Hancock, *Country and Calling*, London: Faber and Faber, 1954, Prologue and chapter I. This first volume of autobiography is a major source for much that follows too.

At the age of 9 he won a bronze medal from the Royal Humane Society for rescuing another small boy from drowning, and at 15 a scholarship to Melbourne Church of England Grammar School. In 1916 his eldest brother, Jim, his hero, as he constantly recalled for the rest of his life, was 'blown to bits on the Somme'. Issues of war and peace thus entered Hancock's mind, never really to leave it. Justin, the second brother, also volunteered; but the Archdeacon and his wife were entitled to veto their third son, Keith, from doing so as well, and the scars took many years to heal.

Latin, Greek and History at Trinity College, Melbourne, followed, the last at the feet of Ernest Scott, Harrison Moore and an engaging Miss Jessie Webb. As the inevitable First was awarded a surprise offer of an Assistant Lectureship came from the University of Western Australia. There a new mentor, Edward Shann, backed him for the Rhodes Scholarship at large which took him to Oxford and to Balliol College in Hilary Term 1922. Just eighteen months later a congratulated second First in History at Oxford followed, and after a visit to Italy, a highly critical reading of the Fascist journal *Gerarchia*, and some quite fortuitous encounters with a pair of Catholic and Evangelical treatments of authority, 'sure enough, Authority was the theme these adorable Fellows of All Souls wished me to discuss in my three-hour essay'. He was the first Australian whom they elected to a Fellowship, and thereby gave him his long enduring second home.

That Italian visit decided a great deal of his course for the future. Not only did Tuscany become his first stamping ground, and Italy grip his heart ever after. Contemporary events—Mussolini and the Fascists—stirred his historical imagination deeply, and set its frame in their mould. He began by asking himself whether in the light of the Italian story the orthodox interpretation of nationalism did not now need some revision? Were democracy and nationality the linked causes they were then presumed to be? Were the patriots of the Risorgimento quite as committed to constitutional freedom as they were to the notion of a united Italy? The complexities of nationalism thereafter held him hostage. He soon fastened on the ten volumes of letters and papers of Baron Ricasoli, the Tuscan dictator, who with Cavour had succeeded in swinging central Italy to Victor Emmanuel's cause, and within three years there came Hancock's first book, *Ricasoli and the Risorgimento in Tuscan* (1926). He always enjoyed saying that after less than 150 copies had been sold, it was remaindered (there was to be a reissue in 1969). For the layman it remains a scintillating read. Specialists still read it, so one hears, with appreciation.²

² W. K. Hancock, *Ricasoli and the Risorgimento in Italy*, London: Faber and Faber, 1926. The reissue was by Howard Fertig, New York, 1969.

In 1925 he married Theaden Brocklebank, a fellow student at Melbourne University, tall, handsome, invariably well groomed, whom their old teacher Ernest Scott was alleged to say had a better mind than Hancock's. He had a point. She was immensely talented, with an eye for colour, for style, and for personalities that outmatched his. During the Second World War she became a highly proficient radio talks producer for the BBC. Yet over the years all too little cohered. No children came their way—'committee work' Hancock called it bitterly—and only fitfully did real happiness break through, most memorably in the early months of their second return to Australia, and then as she lay dying of cancer in 1960.

In 1924 Willie Mitchell, the all but immortal Aberdonian Vice-Chancellor of Adelaide University, had successfully stalked Hancock for its chair of History. Since their homeland always beckoned they moved there in 1926. With just one colleague in the History Department he threw himself into teaching—on Tudor history; already obsessed with issues of peace and war, on European diplomatic history from Castlereagh to Grey; and on the Renaissance. This last led him to immerse himself in Machiavelli, who lurked in his mind ever after. Some of these themes found their way into the collection of essays, *Politics in Pitcairn*, which he published in 1947. There, the *Bounty* mutineer, John Adams and his successors play surrogate for the ills of European history, and there is a devastating critique of the *Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy* called 'Machiavelli in Modern Dress'.³

The Adelaide years were especially notable, however, for *Australia* (1930).⁴ Written for Benn's Modern World Series, it was the first of his several attempts to try to understand his own country. It resonates to this day: upon the relationship between the Commonwealth of Australia and its States; on the White Australia policy; on the importance for their day of Independent Australian Britons; on Australia's political parties both of the right and of the left; on its foreign policy; on its arts and letters. It is still 'the most professional and profound single volume about the country'.⁵

Yet for Hancock personally it could never cover a deepening void. Adelaide he found to be insufferably small town; Australia, in its boom years, at once feckless and vulgar. Increasingly he felt himself *déplacé*. He ached for those larger worlds, of mind, of sight, of imagination which there lay beyond his grasp. The rifts between *Country and Calling*, as the first volume of his autobiography published in 1954 was poignantly to be called,

³ W. K. Hancock, *Politics in Pitcairn and Other Essays*, London: Macmillan, 1947.

⁴ W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, London: Benn, 1930. There was a later paperback edition, with a new Preface, by the Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, in 1961.

⁵ Obituary by Professor K. S. Inglis of the Australian National University, *The Age*, 15 August 1988.

tore him in twain. After finishing *Australia* he soldiered on for four years, but eventually in 1934 accepted the chair of History at Birmingham University. There he warmed to his two Vice-Chancellors, Sir Charles Grant Robertson and Sir Raymond Priestley, and enjoyed the company of his fellow Arts Professors, de Selincourt (who had been instrumental in getting him to come) and E. R. Dodds amongst them. He found his Department engagingly close knit. He kept in mind that most of his students would in the pattern of those inter-war years become schoolteachers. Several lasting friendships with colleagues, students and Birmingham citizens were forged, and he always remembered his time there with great affection.

In his All Souls years he had inevitably been pulled as a colonial into the world of Lionel Curtis, Philip Kerr (Lord Lothian) and the Round Table group. Upon his return to England he was invited to join their company once again. Yet as early as 1936 he broke with them. His experience of Mussolini bestriding Italy, his immersion in Machiavelli's thought upon 'power politics', and his much more general reading of four centuries of European history, led him to reject their appeasement with some revulsion. War, he did not need telling, was an utter abomination, but some fates were even worse.

In his last years in Adelaide he had begun to map out a massive book—which had helped stoke his frustration there—which he privately called (in what his friends came to recognize as his own distinctive language) 'Moloch or Greedy Guts', 'the emergence and dominance of that ravening monster, that insatiable devourer of men, the armed sovereign state'. Although he realized it would very probably be an altogether unmanageable task, he nonetheless yearned to loose himself on some substantial subject that would allow him to pursue all the cogitations he had engaged in over the past ten years or so. When in 1934 Arnold Toynbee suggested that he should write a companion series to his own *Surveys of International Affairs* that would encompass the world-wide British Empire and Commonwealth to any extent he chose. Hancock accepted the suggestion with alacrity. It would focus more strongly on contemporary issues than *Ricasoli* or *Australia*, and it would directly engage both his own origins, and his now greatly enlarged spectrum of interests and experience. The result was Hancock's masterpiece, in a field where the possibility of something deserving that ascription had scarcely yet been essayed.

The first volume of his *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (subtitled *Problems of Nationality 1918–1936*) was published in 1937.⁶ Eschewing the traditional approach that ran from the Durham Report of

⁶ London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

1839 to the Statute of Westminster of 1931, he fastened on the obtuse cases: Ireland; the struggle for Dominions' autonomy; Indian immigrants in Kenya and South Africa; Palestine, Ceylon, Newfoundland, Malta. Much was instant history, drawing on a great deal of oral evidence. He visited Ireland, and talked with de Valera; 'made friends with romantic young men of the IRA who had been gunmen, or pretended they had been'; 'talked with the man who had given the order to shoot Erskine Childers', and called upon the Professors at both Trinity College and University College, Dublin. He then went to Malta, and in Palestine had the experience of having his train to Jerusalem halted by an Arab bomb. Out of all this he conjured up a sustained argument that while to a quite remarkable degree *imperium et libertas* had begun to be reconciled in Britain's relations with its overseas Dominions, several well nigh irremovable obstacles still remained elsewhere. He relentlessly identified and analysed these, and to this day, despite two very distinguished successors in the *Survey* series, any attempt to comprehend the transformation from Empire to Commonwealth without blinkers still begins with Hancock's first volume.

With the outbreak of the Second World War volume two (subtitled *Problems of Economic Policy 1918–1939*) had perforce to be published in two parts, in 1940 and 1942.⁷ Two sets of concepts provided its organizing themes: Adam Smith's antithetical poles of 'mercantilism' and 'the great commercial republic', and Turner's Frontier thesis (covering here, settlers, trade, investment, missionaries and planters). Part one of volume two explored the successive attempts, with their climax in the Ottawa agreements of 1932, to make of the Empire-commonwealth a self sufficient economic whole. Ranging across a vast territory Hancock showed that despite the intense energy poured by so many people into the whole idea no such possibility ever existed. With no confidential material available to him when he wrote, this was a remarkable intellectual and historical critique to have made. Several passages remain famous, and his basic analysis holds the field to this day.⁸

Part two began by focusing upon South Africa. Here the evolution of segregation constituted his guiding theme. Though careful to be fair to South Africa's whites, economic realities, he argued, made effective segregation quite impossible: the choice lay between an economy where African participation would be that 'of a sullen and rebellious proletariat,

⁷ London: Oxford University Press, 1940, 1942. He was to have gone on to write a further volume about India, but the war precluded this, and the aftermath changed the whole scene. The immense loss to Indian studies can only be guessed at.

⁸ For an interesting critique see Norman Etherington, *Theories of Imperialism: War, Conquest and Capital*, London: Croom Helm, 1984, especially pp. 216–25.

or of a people learning to collaborate in freedom, friendliness and hope'. That judgment has worn well. Yet there have been critics. 'Hancock's *Survey* chapter on South Africa is a brilliant condensation of South African History as seen from the late 1930s', it has been said, but, the same authors go on, he was blind 'to the experiences of black South Africans, and their search for social justice and national identity'.⁹

The West African section which followed puts some of that in question. It gave a masterly account and critique of the West African export trade, where, so Hancock averred, trading agreements were no doubt a condition for the trading firms' survival, yet they had not only had a seriously adverse effect on many Africans. They had significantly reduced the potential benefits that an open economy could have brought. Empire, he argued, must not merely eschew exploitation. It must commit itself to development across a broad front, and take the initiative in securing international cooperation to improve living standards everywhere. Fifty years on we have scarcely moved any further.

Taken as a whole, 'Hancock's book', so David Fieldhouse writes, 'stands out as the first major work of synthesis which . . . brought into a single historical and conceptual framework the whole gamut of British colonizing experience from the seventeenth century to the eve of the Second World War . . . imperial history was never the same again'.¹⁰ At a stroke it made him the doyen of all historians of the Commonwealth until his death half a century later.

In 1933 he had written a chapter on Australia between 1900 and 1914 for the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*.¹¹ Ten years later in the midst of the Second World War he wrote a Penguin Special, *Argument of Empire* (1943),¹² based upon his *Survey*, in which he made a spirited defence of the British empire against its unknowing detractors in the United States. After the war he gave the Marshall Lectures—*Wealth of Colonies* (1950)¹³—in which he pursued several of his earlier themes.

All this time, however, he had been overwhelmingly involved in what was to be the largest enterprise he ever essayed in contemporary history. Alongside everything else he soon became the prime figure in this field as

⁹ Saul Dubow and Shula Marks, 'Keith Hancock Looks at South Africa', Seminar Paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London 1988.

¹⁰ David Fieldhouse, 'Keith Hancock and Imperial Economic History: A Retrospect Forty Years On', and in Frederick Madden and David Fieldhouse, eds., *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth. Essays presented to Sir Edgar Williams*, London: Croom Helm, 1982, chapter 7. This has been particularly helpful for the preceding paragraphs too.

¹¹ 'The Commonwealth, 1900–1914' in Ernest Scott, *Australia, Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. VII, part I, Cambridge University Press, 1933, chapter XVII.

¹² W. K. Hancock, *Argument of Empire*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943.

¹³ W. K. Hancock, *Wealth of Colonies*, Cambridge University Press, 1950.

well. In 1941 he was appointed Supervisor of the Civil Histories of the War. This quite singular project was the brainchild of Edward Bridges, Secretary to the Cabinet, who had known Hancock at All Souls where they were both Fellows. Bridges was determined that British war-time experience should be 'funded' for future use. Hancock could well have gone to India as Constitutional Adviser to the Viceroy (instead of H. V. Hodson), but—remembering Jim—he could not bring himself to leave Britain in the midst of war (after crowded days in Whitehall he spent night after night clambering over the roofs of St Paul's Cathedral firewatching).

In accepting his new appointment he once more mapped out the broad approach himself. The histories, he determined, should be histories not of departments but of subjects. Their identification was to be made by looking first at what came up to Cabinet for determination. Thereafter extensive work was to be done in the mountains of files which were soon accumulating in the relevant individual ministries (by the end of the war there were twelve million in the Board of Trade alone). He himself wrote preliminary surveys of each subject and outlined the ensuing book plans. In the course of doing this he consulted and proceeded to win the confidence of extremely busy Permanent Secretaries and their staffs, who even before the war's end recognized the administrative usefulness of the wide knowledge thus acquired. Hancock himself was soon given a unique vote of confidence by being permitted to be one of the very few people besides Churchill, Bridges and the Secretariat of the War Cabinet who saw all the papers of the War Cabinet and its committees. Rarely can an historian have been given quite so privileged a position in the midst of similar great events.

Despite the difficulties of recruiting good historians whilst the war was on he succeeded in gathering a galaxy of talents for his task. Among the 24 or so who joined him were W. Ashworth, C. B. A. Behrens, W. H. B. Court, D. Hay, R. J. Hammond, J. Hurstfield, A. V. Judges, W. H. Medlicott, K. Murray, M. M. Postan, R. S. Sayers, C. C. Wrigley. He took special pride in 'discovering' Richard Titmuss (later, without a first degree, the first Professor of Social Administration at the London School of Economics), and Margaret Gowing (later Professor of the History of Science at Oxford), with whom he wrote the key synoptic volume on the *British War Economy* (1949). The unquestioned captain of his team, he won their warm devotion. It proved to be critically important that he was housed in the War Cabinet Offices and was well-known, liked and admired among the senior ranks in Whitehall. For in due course there were major battles to be fought, particularly over the publication of R. R. Titmuss' volume on *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) and M. M. Postan's on *British War Production* (1952), but with the help of Bridges and then of his

successor, Norman Brook, he eventually succeeded in winning them all. In due course 28 volumes were published,¹⁴ none falling by the wayside. To this day the series comprises the greatest single account of British civilian affairs at any one point in time.

In 1944, well before the war ended, he had been elected to the Chichele Professorship of Economic History at Oxford. His concern with economic history went back to his teachers, Scott and Shann, in Australia. It had been stirred by his fascination with Ricasoli's wine industry, and had then been steadily reinforced by *Australia*, the *Survey*, and the war histories. Those of us of the post-war generation went to hear him lecture on the industrial revolution in a crowded Old Library at All Souls, and then attended a vividly remembered 'circus' in the Examination Schools on a succession of war economies, including a medieval one, which he himself launched.

In 1949, with the warm support of London figures like Dame Lillian Penson and Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, he agreed to become founding Director of the new Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London. There he lovingly turned 27 Russell Square into a particularly handsome headquarters, and then replicated his extraordinary success with the *Civil Histories* by bringing into a new discourse upon the Commonwealth a further remarkably talented, and this time a much more interdisciplinary, range of people. These included W. H. Morris-Jones (political science), Jack Fisher (economic history), Stanley de Smith (law), Gerald Graham (imperial history), John Barnes (anthropology), Roland Oliver (African history), Hugh Tinker and Bruce Miller (political science). By now his unsurpassed skill as a seminar chairman was finely honed. Papers, he insisted, were to be typed, circulated and read in advance. (His aide at the Institute, Alison Smith, was made responsible for all of this.) Once a paper had been briefly introduced, he would make it his own business to widen and deepen the range of issues that it raised, and then manoeuvre all of those present, including the youngest, into the ensuing 'talk' (always then and thereafter a characteristic Hancockian term).

During the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s he had been one of those, along with Margery Perham and Lords Lugard and Hailey, who had been periodically consulted by the Colonial Office on issues concerning Africa. Not, however, until the early 1950s did he become directly involved himself. Then in 1954 he accepted an invitation to go to Uganda

¹⁴ They were all published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office between 1949 and 1964. The above paragraphs owe much to Margaret Gowing, 'The Civil Histories of the Second World War', Seminar Paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London 1988. She has been very generous with her help elsewhere too.

to chair a constitutional investigation following upon the bitterly contested deportation of the Kabaka of Buganda by the Governor of Uganda, Sir Andrew Cohen. During the three months of his visit those of us who witnessed these events at first hand saw the magic of *Wankoko* (chicken, as the Baganda promptly dubbed him) going to work once again. Upon his arrival he was taken to a crowded open meeting of the Buganda Lukiko (parliament). There he told them very directly that he would be neither their man nor the government's. He would be his own. Accompanied by Stanley de Smith, the constitutional lawyer, whom he brought out to assist him, he chaired a committee of Baganda notables, and once they had clarified the issues which called for determination, they were joined by Cohen and his advisers, who, in an extraordinary gesture for a colonial governor, agreed to sit under Hancock's continuing chairmanship. Amid an impassioned political confrontation outside Hancock brilliantly secured agreement between the outraged Baganda leaders and the British governor.¹⁵ Whilst in the years to come it was all to fall apart, the fault was in no way his. It was maladroitness later actors who lifted the hatch to the abyss. Upon his side he always treasured the memories of those Baganda with whom he worked, and they theirs of him.

Back in London he had already committed himself to the major scholarly task which, with the *Civil Histories* now emerging in a steady stream, next engrossed his energies. Following the *Survey* and the *Civil Histories*, his earlier drive for 'Moloch' had been largely assuaged. Still needing, however, a large subject to tackle, he had gratefully accepted an invitation to write the biography of the former South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts. Along with his protracted collaboration with Jan van de Poel in assembling the long series of volumes of Smuts Papers, all of this took him fifteen years to complete.¹⁶ The first volume, *Smuts. The Sanguine Years 1970–1919*, was eventually published in 1962; the second, *Smuts. The Fields of Force 1919–1950*, in 1968.¹⁷ It was never to be an official biography, yet it assuredly became definitive, and has not looked like being matched. One striking feature lay in the extraordinary identification between the author and his subject. Both of them colonials, deeply attached to the lands from which they came, yet endlessly drawn to the much larger arenas their British connections gave them. What was more Hancock knew how to manipulate, so he was alert to Smuts' 'slimness'.

¹⁵ D. A. Low, 'The Namirembe Conferences', in *Buganda in Modern History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, chapter 4.

¹⁶ W. K. Hancock and J. van der Poel, eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, Cambridge University Press, 1966, vols. I–IV; J. van der Poel, ed., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, vols. V–VI.

¹⁷ The two volumes were published by Cambridge University Press.

For his own part he relished the opportunity to engage his own talents with a subject whose abilities evidently matched his own. The amplitude of Smuts' career gave him the chance to explore once again many of the issues he had made his own. He became fascinated by the interaction in Smuts' career between his roles as colonial nationalist and as internationalist; as anti-imperialist patriot and leading Commonwealth statesman; as man of peace and war-leader. He treasured the opportunity to try his hand at some of the necessary labour history; to come to grips with the phenomenon that was Mahatma Gandhi; and to write about friendship, and about the human condition in all sorts of other ways as well. He did his best with Smuts' 'holism', much better indeed than other biographers have done with like problems, but he was never entirely at home with abstract philosophy. 1070 pages of text and 67 pages of notes later his two volumes lay finished, each of them widely read so soon as they appeared, and extensively reviewed with warm appreciation in every place that mattered.

There was the old issue of whether he understood sufficiently the 'inherent injustices of white supremacy'. In 1954 he had devoted the last chapter of *Country and Calling* to discussing the historian's craft in terms of 'Inquiry and Narration', and had there set forth his principal injunction to those who sought to practice it by admonishing them to display 'attachment, justice and span'. *Smuts* is replete with the first two, and has a great deal more of the third than is sometimes allowed; and in the end even his critics aver that 'Hancock's dispassionate treatment of South Africa and the comparative perspective which he brings to a region that often insists on its "uniqueness" is manifestly a major scholarly achievement'.¹⁸

Whilst *Smuts* was still in train he made the crucial decision of his life: to return finally to Australia.

Beginning in 1948 he had been one of the four wise men, along with Florey, Oliphant and Firth, all expatriates in Britain from Australasia, who had been brought into close consultation over the creation of the new Australian National University in Canberra. The hope had been that they would compose its initial, preeminent professoriate. However for Hancock there had then been a fateful conversation with its first Vice-Chancellor upon a London park bench, which for reasons he never fully divulged, put paid to all of that. 'Country and calling' were still at odds with each other. However, when the ANU's second Vice-Chancellor, Leslie Melville, later visited London to press him to go to Canberra after all he finally agreed to do so, in part at least for domestic reasons since by now Theaden was in and out of breakdowns, and they never succeeded in solving their

¹⁸ Dubrow and Marks, loc. cit.

housing problems. In 1957 he became Professor of History in the new university and Director of its Research School of Social Sciences. The university provided them with a custom-built house in a eucalypt clump on the campus, where there was a garden to tend, turds to be collected in its aid in the paddock below, and before long Felice the black cat.

As he settled in, he moved into temporary office accommodation in the Old Hospital Building, still *terra sacra* to its old denizens. He had been careful to arrange that in the room next door there should be an administrator whose principal job it was to tell him: 'sign here, it's alright'. He found two existing appointees in the History Department: Laurie Fitzhardinge, Australia's foremost bibliographer (whom Hancock successfully bullied into finishing his long awaited two volume biography of the Australian Prime Minister; William Morris Hughes), and Bob Gollan, Australia's leading labour historian. Anthony Low was recruited from Uganda to support his interests in Africa, and initiate Australian research into modern Indian history. Eleanor Serle, an expert on Battle Abbey and the wife of an ANU astronomer, was brought in to be the department's medievalist and gave a crucial boost to the field, particularly through a memorable seminar-workshop. Two Research Fellows, Margaret Steven and Geoffrey Bolton, made up the full complement.

Soon departmental seminars were upon the ICS pattern. Best of all, the Australianists had to listen to the Indianists and the Medievalists, and vice versa. They all had to address both their own specialisms and engage a wider audience. There was scarcely a better training for research students, nor for their supervisors either. Oddly he was not always himself the best supervisor of Ph.D. students. Despite his proverbial openness some of them found him overawing. There was the memorable day when one research student (later to be a distinguished Professor) was sent out of a departmental meeting to put a tie on, and another when his assembled colleagues were told to call him henceforth Keith. Soon, however, the department was as close-knit as the one in Birmingham had been, and there are those who affirm that in his day for all its small size it exercised the leadership in historical studies in Australia it was intended to do.

From the outset he was determined to learn more about his own homeland once again. In a typically imaginative way he did so by choosing 'Wool'. There has been much talk—a good deal of it, of course, critical—about interdisciplinary work and interdisciplinary seminars. No such enterprise has been more successful than Hancock's 'Wool seminar' in those first few years back in Canberra. To this he successfully recruited historians, political scientists, biologists, earth scientists, medical scientists, bureaucrats. Dozens of them wrote papers about animals, soil, trace elements, breeding, erosion, sheep populations, fleece, heat, 'squatters',

the shearers' union, capital growth, Country Party politics, the Wool Board, synthetics, overseas markets, China and its wool imports, and wool as the world's cheapest form of heating. During the best part of three years he became the mentor, cynosure, and guiding force of this whole enterprise, and in due course a volume of forty papers came to be published.¹⁹ 'Country and calling' were at last beginning to coalesce.

With the Wool seminar behind him he then seized hold of an even larger Australian project, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, for which Fitzhardinge had been collecting a preliminary card index for some time. In the event this proved to be a much more onerous task. Suspicious historians from other Australian Universities had to be assuaged. State committees had to be adroitly constructed. Contributors had to be firmly told they would not be paid for their contributions. The ANU had to be persuaded to provide for a general editor and a staff, and some difficult critics had to be mollified. Yet it was all done. In terms of the range of those chosen for inclusion and of the original research especially done, the result is without equal, the *DNB* not excluded. In due course he passed the whole project on to a succession of other people. In 1986 he was asked to launch the *ADB's* tenth volume, and did so with all his old panache. The *Dictionary* is his greatest legacy to his own country.²⁰

In his last decades he thought deeply about issues that had long preoccupied him and about new ones as well, drawing many of them into a new overview. Back in 1961 he had given the Wiles Lectures at Queen's University, Belfast, and brought together all he then had to say about *War and Peace in this Century*.²¹ Twenty years later he wrote a powerful critique of Australia's defence commitments to the United States.²² When in 1973 he was invited to give the Boyer Lectures for the Australian Broadcasting Commission he did so under the title, *Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*.²³ By then he had started to become somewhat discursive, roaming over war, pollution, Machiavelli, Desmond Morris, the Americans and much of Australia too. Yet a good deal of this was still vintage Hancock. For a while he became obsessed by a very local issue concerning the erection of a telecom tower in the middle of Canberra and wrote an angry pamphlet on *The Battle of Black Mountain* (1974).²⁴ But he was not

¹⁹ Alan Barnard, *The Simple Fleece*, Melbourne University Press, 1962.

²⁰ It is being published by Melbourne University Press.

²¹ W. K. Hancock, *War and Peace in this Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1961.

²² 'Our Interests and Obligations in Peace and War', in R. O'Neill and D. M. Horner, eds., *Australian Defence Policy for the 1980s*, Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 1982.

²³ W. K. Hancock, *Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1973.

²⁴ W. K. Hancock, *The Battle of Black Mountain. An Episode of Canberra's Environmental History*, Canberra: Department of Economic History, Australian National University, 1974.

done yet. In 1976 he produced the second volume of his autobiography called *Professing History*, which covered Smuts, Buganda, the return to Australia, Black Mountain, 'Teaching',²⁵ and in 1982 put together a selection of his pieces in a small volume called *Perspectives in History*.²⁶ None of these was more deeply felt than 'Rome: Caput Mundi and Italian Capital'; Italy still lay stamped upon his heart. Then in 1984, when well into his eighties, he allowed himself to be taped for an extraordinary series of radio talks. These had a host of allusions, and included a superb literary fugue upon Gulliver and his travels. They were published as *Testimony* (1985),²⁷ which in a real sense they were.

He had been knighted in 1953, and in 1965 became KBE at Sir Robert Menzies' instance. In 1950 he had been elected a Fellow of the British Academy. In the late 1960s he successfully presided over the creation of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and became its founding President in 1969. By then Honorary Degrees had crowded in: Rhodes, Cambridge, Birmingham, Oxford, Cape Town, Melbourne, ANU, Adelaide, Western Australia, along with Foreign Membership of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and—much cherished—an Italian honour.

His most notable achievement in these later years was fairly certainly, however, *Discovering Monaro* (1972),²⁸ revealingly the only major book he wrote of his own volition since *Ricasoli*. Begun just as he retired, it had much of the unevenness of a young man's book, yet all of its excitement too, as he led the van into the quite new field of Australian environmental history. He relished the fact that it brought him into close contact with Australia's prehistorians, with their debates about 'fire-stick farming' and the Bogong moth, and took him into the houses and records of the property-owners of the Monaro uplands. It led him into assuming an important role in the campaign to preserve Australia's unique Snowy Mountains for posterity, and once again made him a pre-eminent historian of his country. Since *Monaro* dealt with the area where he loved to fish, country and calling finally, quite marvellously, cohered.

When the Hancocks finally moved back to Australia in 1957 they took with them Majorie Eyre, for many years his secretary in the Cabinet Office and then at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, to ease the transition.

²⁵ W. K. Hancock, *Professing History*, Sydney University Press, 1976. It provides supporting evidence upon all these matters.

²⁶ W. K. Hancock, *Perspective in History*, Canberra: Department of Economic History, Australian National University, 1982.

²⁷ W. K. Hancock, *Testimony*, Canberra: Department of Economic History, Australian National University, 1985.

²⁸ W. K. Hancock, *Discovering Monaro. A Study of man's Impact on the Environment*, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

She went back to London, but once Theaden lay dying they pressed her to return, and in the year after Theaden's death in 1961 her own expressed hope that Keith and Majorie should marry was then fulfilled. They gave each other much happiness. Few men like him have celebrated not one but two silver weddings. During their later years they lived in a tiny house a mile or so from the ANU campus, and spent most of their holidays in the cottage Theaden had just seen built at Bawley Point on a marvellous stretch of unspoilt New South Wales coastline. They kept good contact with his two sisters and his brother Justin and his family, and close bonds were sustained with Theaden's brother's family too, including three nephews.

When he first settled in Canberra he was somewhat put out that heads of government departments did not pay court to him as so many of their counterparts had come to do in London. He soon realized they were of a different breed, and found himself instead taking immense pleasure in the company of many colleagues in different disciplines at the ANU. Amongst these were Bart Bok, the astronomer, Dale Trendall, the classicist, Bob Robertson, the biologist, John Passmore, the philosopher, Mark Oliphant, the physicist, Perce Partridge, the political scientist, and the historians, Noel Butlin, Barry Smith, Manning Clark, Oliver Macdonagh, John Mulvaney, Bruce Kent and many others too. There was never a sign in his declining years that he ever regretted his decision to return home.

Of somewhat less than average height, he retained the looks of a younger man under an ample and sometimes unruly head of hair which prematurely went white. Late in life June Mendoza painted him in his stained corduroy jacket leaning slightly forward in his favourite high chair. That is how he will quite properly be remembered. Always a puckish raconteur both of rhyme and of ribaldry, he possessed his own distinctive language. 'Psephology', and anything to do with election studies, were always 'knobbery'. He called his Chinese dentist (affectionately, it must be said, after the book) *The Cruel See*. 'Committee work' remained his most disparaging denunciation. A great lover of cats, a determined if irregular fisherman, an infrequent if wayward cricketer, a quite outrageous reinterpreter of the rules of deck tennis, and as the years wore on a regular attender at Sunday Matins once again too.

He was by any standards a quite exceptional conversationalist, particularly upon the long country walks he loved to take with his friends. (When he was well over 80 he beat many of the younger members of his party to the top of Pigeon Loft in New South Wales.) Blessed with formidable powers of concentration (much of the first volume of *Smuts* was written with a stub pencil on his kitchen table while Theaden lay dying), he would plunge into the deeps of every issue which he tackled, and explore far

beyond the fields he chiefly ploughed (in his seventies the Book of Job amongst others). With an extraordinary capacity to organize his thoughts coherently, he could set them down in a prose of consummate grace and clarity, to leave the hammering out he gave them resounding in one's mind. Seemingly this came to him without effort. Yet he always insisted—to himself as well to others—that it was vital to listen to the rhythm of one's prose and make sure that that was right, for it was only then that there was any chance of carrying the reader along. He himself was a masterly exponent of this testing art.

Beyond all else he was the academic *animateur*, well nigh beyond peer. This began in his own remarkable instinct for originality, his abiding penchant for lateral thinking, and his continuing delight in daring leaps of the mind—so long as these came down upon firm ground on the other side! In every serious talk colleagues and friends had with him they knew, that invariably careful as he himself was, and insisted others should be too, in the meticulous use of evidence, it was these things which engaged him most, whereas mere learning rarely did. In the end therefore it is for his extraordinary ability to impart his instinctive preference for intellectual daring to others that he will chiefly be remembered. No coast hugger he. Out into the deep for him, and for all those who chose to sail forth behind him.

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