

Elizabeth Kwan review of Peter Browne and Seumas Spark, eds, *'I Wonder': The Life and Work of Ken Inglis*

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This memoir honours the life and work of Ken Inglis (1929–2017), adjunct professor at Monash University, emeritus professor at The Australian National University, and one of Australia's most admired and warmly regarded historians. Colleagues, family and friends presented 18 wide-ranging papers at the Laconic Colloquium held at Monash University on two cool days in November 2016. A hundred or so people happily gathered from around Australia and overseas to honour Ken and his work. Three of his former PhD students from the early 1990s were there: two from Canberra, and I came from Darwin. Inglis, despite being wheelchair-bound for two long days, entered into the spirit of the occasion, 'drawing on his remarkable memory to offer new glimpses of his methods, experiences and work' (p. xvi).

Editors Peter Browne and Seumas Spark drew most of the papers together in 'roughly chronological order' (p. xvii), using as its title a phrase so typical of Ken's approach to life and his work, *'I Wonder'*. Three papers—by Graeme Davison, Ian Maddocks and Bruce Scates—had been published as a retrospective for Inglis and his scholarship in *History Australia* in 2017. Davison and Maddocks wrote new chapters for the book and Raelene Frances joined Scates in writing about Inglis's secondary schooling. Four new chapters were commissioned 'to present a fuller picture of Ken's scholarly life': his pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 1965; and his publications, *The Australian Colonists: An Exploration of Social History 1788–1870*; *Australians: A Historical Library*; and *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*. Authors made good use of extensive archives Inglis placed in the National Library of Australia and the Australian War Memorial, as well as his written works (listed in 17 pages at the end of the book). The richness authors revealed in this memoir will interest both academics and the general readers Ken so valued.

Many of the authors identified a symbiotic relationship between Inglis and his work. Through these chapters, we see autobiography playing a significant role as Ken's observations prompted questions and a search for evidence as a basis for wondering and pursuing answers. More than one author referred to Inglis's boyhood memories of the Armistice Day ceremony in the schoolyard or his sense of mystery in the design of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. We see this relationship played out in his three major works: *Sacred Places*, *The Australian Colonists* and *Dunera Lives*.

Inglis cared deeply about Australia and its people. He worked for some 40 years to understand and explain to others the significance Anzac Day, war memorials and the ceremonies surrounding them had, and still have, in Australia. Peter Stanley traced 'the evolution of spirituality' (p. 307) in Inglis's work, from his religious social history studies in England to papers he presented and published. The outcome, according to Bill Gammage (a colleague and close friend of Ken) was that, through Inglis, Australians came to know 'something which we thought we had always known', and that 'academics ignored Anzac not because it was unimportant, but because they took it for granted'. His books, Bill added, 'have changed our understanding of Australian minds and hearts' (p. 318).

Other authors added significant developments in Inglis's understanding of the evolution of spirituality. Stuart Macintyre noted evidence of Ken's Protestantism 'that affirmed the personal conscience of the believer, "the voice of God" finding expression through the individual bearing witness in public endeavours' (p. 50), which can be seen in much of Ken's historical and journalistic work. Robert Dare made a strong case for developments while Ken was in Adelaide: his notice in 1956 of the significant shift in Australia 'from organized religion to what he called "civic religion"' (p. 83), involving the gradual secularisation of religious festivals and 'the sacralisation of secular practices' (p. 85) as formal religion declined. From that time Ken dated his interest in war in Australian society, and thus Anzac, and became 'puzzled then frustrated, by the neglect in university history courses of the history of war' (p. 85). Ken's 'Anzac: The Substitute Religion' in *Nation* was published in April 1960. Dare argued that 'Ken's discovery of what he called civic religion while he was in Adelaide yielded some of the richest and most rewarding scholarship we have' (p. 87). Listening to Ken's 'distinctive authorial voice', Dare believed, meant understanding 'that for Ken writing history was not a passionless pursuit of truths that stand outside him, but an outgrowth of his universe of values and experience' (p. 86)—a reminder of the role of autobiography.

Graeme Davison was present at the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) Congress in 1964 and heard Inglis deliver his paper 'The Anzac Tradition'. In it Ken questioned Professor J. M. Ward's neglect of the work of Dr Charles Bean, official historian of Australia in the Great War, in his survey of historical writing in Australia and New Zealand that had been recently published in the United States. Ken's plea to historians, to consider what meaning the rites of Anzac might have, ended with his declaration that 'A study of the ceremonies of life and death performed on Anzac Day should tell much about our society; and a national history which does not explore the meaning of these ceremonies is too thin' (p. 146).

Frances and Scates reminded us of the power of Ken's memories of his primary school years, his feelings of shame as he stood in silence in the playground on Armistice Day, without the medals on his chest some other boys and girls were wearing from

their fathers, to comment: 'Involved but detached ... with young eyes ever alert to the meaning and power of symbol and ritual, none would prove better qualified to reveal the meanings of Anzac' (p. 29). We see how Ken invested so much of his life—from a young child to an ageing grandfather—in his search for meaning, and for justice for Australian men, women and children traumatised by war.

By the 1990s, when Inglis presented his work in Europe, the French scholar Professor Annette Becker spoke highly of his contribution to the field of history and memory in an international context. 'He wore his learning lightly, but this comparative element gave his writing great depth' (p. 330). Becker explained how:

[h]is grasp of the significance of these memorials was unique—transnational while deeply Australian, anthropological in spirit and empirical in form. They constitute 'holy ground' but he looked at them with the eyes of a non-believer, or rather the eyes of someone who was intrigued by the beliefs and sentiments of those who came to them. (pp. 323–24)

Emeritus Professor Jay Winter, a military historian and editor of the three-volume *Cambridge History of the First World War* published in 2014, became a close friend and colleague of Ken in the growing field of history, memory and war in the 1990s. For him, *Sacred Places* is 'a profound book of the self-fashioning of the Australian nation in the shadow of the First World War' (p. 351).

In *The Australian Colonists*, Frank Bongiorno found Inglis's effective use of social history to integrate various themes in exploring subjects specialist historians had neglected. The book's four sections—The People, Holidays Old and New, War and Peace, and The Stuff of History—made Australian history much more accessible to readers. '[B]eautifully written' and illustrated and 'deeply biographical' (p. 224), the book was 'an important breakthrough in the presentation of Australian history' (p. 225). Bongiorno recognised the autobiographical element in Ken's treatment of warfare in the book—a reminder of Malcolm Allbrook and Melanie Nolan's view of Australian historians using autobiography in works that 'question major rungs of the Australian national story' and that 'have come to be regarded as "major contributions to the national literature"'.¹ For Ken, as for many Australian colonists, 'war was a troubling absence', yet also 'powerfully real, a presence tangible in the monuments built during Inglis's childhood'. For him '[t]his strange yet culturally potent mixture of absence and presence would become the puzzle that most engaged his intellect, imagination and passion' (p. 235).

1 Malcolm Allbrook and Melanie Nolan, 'Australian Historians and Biography', in *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, no. 1 (2018): 15, doi.org/10.22459/AJBH.2018.01, citing Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 74, 90.

Inglis's last books, *Dunera Lives*, Volumes 1 and 2—coauthored with Seumas Spark, Bill Gammage, Jay Winter and Carol Bunyan—were a tribute to his history tutor, Franz Philipp, a *Dunera* man at the University of Melbourne, who inspired Ken to become an academic. The books were a memoir of the *Dunera* men, but at the same time of Ken himself. Spark, who worked so closely with Ken on both volumes concluded that '*Dunera Lives* is not about Ken—he saw to that—but the two volumes do answer some questions about his life' (p. 346). Ken wanted his grandchildren to know the story of the *Dunera* boys, a story that 'mattered morally, and was worth elaborating as a tale of collective injustice and survival'.²

As a journalist, the connection between Inglis's life and the books *The Stuart Case* (1961) and the two volumes on the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission; later Corporation) of 1983 and 2006, was close. Ken was drawn into the Stuart Case while at the University of Adelaide, after his wife, Judy Inglis, became involved in a group seeking a fair trial for the initiated Arrernte man Rupert Max Stuart. Through Ken's survey of Australian daily papers, and his article in the *Nation* in 1959 questioning the police handling of the case and the legality of the sentence of hanging for the accused, he drafted the pamphlet that led the South Australian premier to set up a royal commission. Bob Wallace and Sue Wallace of Adelaide carefully related the complex legal-political story, arguing that 'there is no question that Ken's direct involvement was a significant factor in averting Stuart's hanging, and that his writing contributed to improvements in police practices and legal procedures' (p. 123). In 1961 Ken's articles became *The Stuart Case*, an important source in training journalists.

Peter Browne's 'Sydney Calling: Ken Inglis and the Press' highlights Ken's joy in writing for the *Nation* in the context of the wider press scene, later reporting on media studies and media history, and publishing a book about the *Nation* and its creators. Glyn Davis's chapter about Ken's books on the ABC shows his 'enormous fun' (p. 265) in researching the vital role played by the broadcaster in Australia, but also his concern at governments' ongoing attempts to control or limit the ABC. Ken readily admitted, in introducing *This is the ABC*, that it was 'concealed autobiography' (p. 260). With research assistance and editorial independence, he enjoyed observing the huge institution at work. Later, as an independent scholar, Ken completed the second volume, *Whose ABC? The Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983–2006*. Despite some criticism of his approach, Ken insisted on being a storyteller, seeking to balance narrative and analysis in his histories. Finding the ABC in reasonable shape in 2006, he expected Australians would become even more dependent on the ABC '[f]or only the ABC ... can "address their audiences

² Ken Inglis, Seumas Spark and Jay Winter with Carol Bunyan, *Dunera Lives, Volume 1: A Visual History* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Press, 2018), 514.

as citizens, not consumers” (p. 273). Davis applauds Ken’s triumph in meeting the challenge of writing an engaging history of what Margaret Simons termed ‘our most important cultural institution’ (p. 273).

Two of the commissioned chapters reveal creative challenges that Inglis and others were unable to address. Martin Crotty outlined Ken’s complicated dilemma of being unable as a historian to publish a book from reports he filed as a journalist to the *Canberra Times* when accompanying Australian and New Zealand veteran pilgrims to Gallipoli in April 1965. Ken was unwilling to expose the difficulties veteran pilgrims suffered from poor RSL planning. After drafting and re-drafting, he decided not to publish the book.

Marian Quartly explored Australian historians’ reluctance to develop Inglis’s innovative suggestion of a slice approach for the history of Australia, centred on the years 1788, 1838, 1888 and 1938. To mark the Bicentenary in 1988, historians meeting at The Australian National University in 1976 agreed to begin work on a multi-volume, multi-authored history of Australia, including Inglis’s slice approach. It was a way of exploring ordinary peoples’ lives at 50-year intervals across the 200 years. When Ken visited most other universities the following year to promote the project, he found little support for the slice approach. That was the year Ken presented at the 1977 ANZAAS conference his paper ‘Monuments and Ceremonies as Evidence for Historians’, on understanding Nazi society through its symbols and rituals, rather than policies—the need for the historian ‘to look at a modern society with the eye of an anthropologist’ (p. 283). In the west Quartly and Alan Atkinson were interested in using an anthropological approach. A series of seminars on cultural theory in practice for history staff and postgraduate students from the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University led them to offer to take on the 1838 volume. They came to see how anthropology enabled social historians to explore other times more effectively. Across Australia, however, many historians were not ready for the ‘collaborative scholarship’ Ken had in mind, which he thought would ‘come off if enough scholars think it worth attempting and if they have the wits and the stamina to see it through’ (p. 279). There was some interest in finding out more about ordinary peoples’ lives in those years, but ‘reviewers were mostly not convinced that slicing was “real history”’ (p. 287).

Joy Damousi, a vacation scholar and then a postgraduate student, found her time during the 1980s in the history program of the Research School of Social Sciences at ANU ‘a great privilege’ (p. 296). Ken’s ‘warm, congenial and generous spirit’ (p. 294) was very welcoming to students. The ‘enduring qualities Ken imparted’, were ones Damousi later tried to convey to her students: ‘that scholarship mattered’ and that writing history was ‘a calling, demanding of commitment’ (pp. 295–96). For Damousi, Ken was ‘the exemplar of an exceptional colleague and mentor’ (p. 299). Above all, she found him to be ‘a great listener’ (p. 301), showing ‘great

respect' for students' work, and then offering 'succinct, clear guidance and direction', always inviting 'conversation and a dialogue'. With that came an 'utter respect for the English language' in both writing and speaking (p. 302).

The qualities evident in Inglis's books, journalism and teaching permeate his many other roles as head of history departments in Australia, and in Papua New Guinea (PNG), as well as vice-chancellor. In the latter role Ken relied heavily on Amirah Inglis for its social side, where her support was 'invaluable' (p. 211). A published historian in her own right, with a master's degree on an aspect of PNG's colonial history, Amirah loved the adventure of their years in the country, as did their blended family of six children, who had many indigenous friends. Amirah and Ken had married almost three years after Judy Inglis died in a car crash in 1962. They shared many interests. Their 'long and successful partnership ... so clearly nourished their emotional and intellectual lives' (p. 241), as Judith Keene found. Ken's dedication of *Dunera Lives, Volume I: A Visual History* 'To the memory of Amirah Inglis' reflected that partnership, but also Amirah's Jewish ancestry, which she shared with many of the *Dunera* boys.³

3 Inglis et al., *Dunera Lives, Volume 1*, xviii, 513–14. Around 80 per cent of the *Dunera* men were Jewish.

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