
Jill Roe

On 6 February 1985, Geoffrey Serle wrote to me inquiring if I would be willing to join the Editorial Board of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. At that stage I had contributed no more than half a dozen entries to the *ADB*, though, like most contributors, I was familiar with its work and aspirations. Naturally, I hastened to say I would be happy to accept.¹

A month or so later, a formal letter arrived from Alan Barnard, acting chair of the Editorial Board, informing me that the vice-chancellor of the ANU, Peter Karmel, had confirmed my appointment to the Editorial Board. On the same day came a notice of the board’s next meeting, to be held at the ANU on Thursday, 25 May; soon after, I received an agenda paper.² So it was really happening. You might even say it was a turning point in my life.

As historians are well aware, turning points have wide ramifications. So it was with my appointment to the Editorial Board. Apart from anything else, I was not the only new appointment. The others were Don Aitkin, a political scientist, and the historian Ann Curthoys, all of us working mainly on twentieth-century

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¹ Jill Roe, personal files. See also ‘GS to KI [Geoff Serle to Ken Inglis], ‘Membership of the Editorial Board’ (26 May 1984), box 132, Q31, ADBA, ANUA. Board members had been circularised to propose ‘(1) contemporary historians/political scientists; (ii) women (iii) re Cunneen ex officio; (iv) non-academics’.

² Jill Roe, personal files.
history. General editor Serle’s note to me had made that dimension clear: ‘We are in the process of enlarging the Board in order to meet a need for younger members, more women members, and people with twentieth-century interests’.

Serle’s phrase ‘enlarging the Board’ encapsulated an even more significant aspect of the change. With the volumes of nineteenth-century lives (Volumes 1–6) long since completed, three of the projected six volumes on the period 1891–1939 already published and a fourth in press (Volume 10 appeared in 1986), work for the remaining two volumes of early twentieth-century lives was well under way. The possibility—and the challenge—of volumes encompassing the later twentieth century beckoned.

There had been considerable discussion at the outset as to when the series should conclude. A meeting at the ANU in October 1959 had left the matter up in the air, suggesting 1920 or 1930. When Volume 1 appeared, a very spare preface announced that there would be 12 volumes and that the series would probably conclude with those who had flourished in 1938. By 1973, when Volume 5 appeared, the ADB was committed to 1939 as the concluding date for its third section, but no overall terminating date was given, nor does it ever seem to have been thereafter. The initial uncertainty is understandable, and the early proposals to end prior to the onset of World War II made sense in the late 1950s when the ADB began; but by the early 1980s the project had been so successful that no-one thought it should stop there. Likewise, by the mid 1980s, it was apparent that a new general editor would have to be appointed soon. Of the two men who had served the ADB so well in that role since the untimely death of Douglas Pike in 1974, Bede Nairn had retired in 1984 owing to ill health and the retirement of Geoffrey Serle was imminent in 1987.3 In his 1985 note to me, Serle summed up the overall situation with characteristic precision. The Editorial Board might need to meet more frequently than in times past, he wrote, ‘in view of the need to appoint a new General Editor and of moving into the post-1940 period’.

Structural change is seldom speedy or drastic in academe. Certainly a modest generational shift was under way, and given that the new appointees were all from New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory, a new dynamic was implicit in the enlargement of the Editorial Board. On the other hand, there were significant continuities. The ANU, in particular, was always well represented on the board, as was only right and proper, given that the history discipline had a continuing role and the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS) provided all the funding.

3 Minutes, Conference of National Advisory Panel and ADB Editorial Board (23–24 April 1960), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA. I thank Christine Fernon for assistance in accessing early ADB records.
ADB staff, Editorial Board members and a few invited guests attended a workshop on the future of the ADB in December 2009. From left, clockwise: Brian Wimborne, Barbara Dawson, Peter Howell, Gail Clements, Michael Roe, John Lack, Ben Evans, Rick van Haeften, Anthea Bundock, John Nethercote, Karen Ciuffetelli, Christine Fernon, Tom Griffiths, Kent Fitch, Ross Coleman, Basil Dewhurst, Chris Cunneen, Geoffrey Bolton, Jim Davidson, David Dunstan, Janet Doust, Darryl Bennet, Nick Brown, Melanie Nolan

Photographer: Darren Boyd, ADB archives

History, as we know from writings about Sir Keith Hancock, was about ‘chaps’. Evidently, it was taken for granted at the outset that historical biography in Australia was to be sustained by ‘chaps’. Not until 1977, almost two decades after the project began, did the situation change, and even then not by much. Apart from Canberra-based Ann Mozley (later Moyal), an ex-officio member of the first Editorial Board, Heather Radi was the only female appointment to the inner counsels of the ADB until 1985. Radi had been a member of the NSW Working Party since the early 1970s, and by 1977 was serving as a member of the Editorial Board and as a section co-editor. The main point here, however, is that the Editorial Board to which she first belonged was in theory rather different from the one to which she transferred in 1985, when it was restructured. I say in theory because, by the 1980s, the administrative arrangements put in place at the beginning to ensure national collaboration were not functioning very well.
From the beginning

Getting the collaborative relationship right has been vital to the ADB’s wellbeing from the beginning. Fortunately for the ADB’s survival, its founder, Sir Keith Hancock, was always clear about that. As he well understood, creating the ADB had to be a collaborative effort, involving all the existing State-based universities. Indeed, if an authoritative product based on primary research was to eventuate, distinctively Australian circumstances meant it could be no other.

Hancock was a historian of high international standing, whose leadership was unquestioned. Even so, the problem of intellectual authority and ownership of the dictionary project was not a straightforward one. At first, and for more than two decades, it was dealt with by establishing two committees to which the core staff in Canberra and the local working parties (of which more shortly) were ultimately to be responsible. The idea was that a National Advisory Committee consisting of State history professors and other senior men of the profession would meet annually, later biennially, and could also be consulted informally if need be. At the same time, a smaller, local Editorial Board was established, consisting of senior advisers from within the ANU, where it could meet regularly. It was to be responsible for the oversight of daily business and to hand if help and advice were called for.4


Photographer: Darren Boyd, ADB archives

4 Minutes, National Committee and ADB Editorial Board meetings (1959–61), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.
That sounds like a sensible and trouble-free solution to the collaborative issue, especially given that the same person—that is, Sir Keith—would chair both bodies. Thereafter, with senior ANU history professors to follow him as chair, there could be no doubt about overall control. Under this arrangement, the general editor, a position created in 1962 after much tribulation (see Chapter 3) and filled full-time by Douglas Pike from 1964, would always know whom to approach in an emergency, as would the chairs of local working parties (if they were not already members of one or other of the committees). This also applied to locally based section editors who were a bit like associate editors, appointed to help the general editor by preparing sections of the projected volumes.

As the project got under way, the dynamics of national collaboration changed, or more precisely slowed. It was not long before the work of the National Advisory Committee (from 1961 the National Committee) formally ceased. There are no minutes after 1971, and Chris Cunneen, who joined the staff in 1974, cannot recall it meeting in the 1970s. Eventually, its members took a self-denying ordinance, and the committee was disbanded.5

The Editorial Board also slowed in the 1970s but survived into the 1980s, when it was restructured. Some parts of the old National Committee carried over, especially the ANU representation and some members of the previous board, including Heather Radi—as was only right since, as a section editor, she exemplified what the changes were about. Clearly there was no need for a national committee to ensure national collaboration by then, but the Editorial Board was still necessary to oversee the project. As articulated in ANU documents at this time, ‘it is responsible for the management and scholarly direction of the Dictionary project’; however, it needed to be more representative of the national effort and, to be useful, to ensure more effective interchanges between the editorial staff in Canberra and the working parties. This was recognised especially by Bede Nairn, and gradually achieved by pruning the membership of the Editorial Board and bringing the section editors onto it.6

The documents I have perused in preparing this chapter are replete with statements about the importance of national collaboration. Much less is said about the working parties, whose overall membership numbered 109 in 2007. It is pleasing to find that in the early days general editors did visit the working parties reasonably regularly; and due, apparently, to a sense that performance

5 Minutes, ADB Editorial Board meeting (2 May 1983), box 125, Q31, ADBA, ANUA, item 8, records that, although the requisite constitutional changes had been made at the previous meeting, ‘the national committee has not yet been invited to disband’. It is not referred to in the 1985 minutes. The 1986 review records that it was formally abolished, with the consent of its members, in 1983: Report of the Committee of Review of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, May 1986.
was variable by the late 1970s, Nairn and Cunneen made a sustained effort in that regard. Indeed, it is probable that the changes of governance effected in 1985 have their origins in those visitations.7

The working parties have been there from the beginning and, if anything, have become more important over time, due to the need for a national dictionary to stay abreast of rising levels of population throughout the country, and for the ADB, though hosted at the ANU, to appear truly ‘national’. During the past 50 years the number of working parties has hovered between seven and nine, with eight at first and nine currently. The original eight included three NSW working parties, in Newcastle and Armidale as well as Sydney, as was appropriate to the period covered by the first two volumes (1788–1850). Later there was a Pacific Working Party, which fitted the needs of the next period (1851–90); during that time also the North Queensland Subcommittee and the Armed Services Working Party appeared on the lists.8

These were functional additions: the Commonwealth Working Party, which was established in 1989 to advise on selections for the 1940–80 period, remains operational but the Indigenous Working Party, formed much later, was soon disbanded. No issue has touched more profoundly on the issue of national collaboration than the representation of Indigenous lives. Although the ADB’s demographics have been more or less correct overall—that is, Indigenous lives are represented at approximately the same proportion as in the population as a whole—this was not apparent to everyone. Indeed, during my time as chair of the Editorial Board (1996–2006), I learned of an informal threat to take the level of representation of Indigenous lives to an international tribunal. The board responded by establishing an Indigenous Working Party. This was a sound and effective response; but it proved to be a temporary solution, as Indigenous energies and skills were already spread too thin, and research into Indigenous lives has special challenges, some still to be mastered. Many remarkable Indigenous lives have, however, been documented—for example, in Volume 15, published in 2000, that of the Central Australian ‘clever man’ Mick McLean/Irinyili. As more research is done, more will come to light and the greater is the likelihood that the representation not only is, but can be seen to be, beyond reproach.9

The difficulties encountered in establishing the Indigenous Working Party are suggestive of the working parties’ real tasks and responsibilities. These have not changed much over time. From official documentation, one might think

7 Cunneen, Chapter 4, this volume. Chris Cunneen to Jill Roe (May 2010), my interpretation.
8 Data drawn from lists published in successive volumes of the ADB.
9 A meeting to establish an Indigenous Working Party was convened in Canberra on 28 May 2005, and a precedent now exists for an Indigenous working party if possible or appropriate in the future. In 2008 Ann Curthoys was appointed as an expert national adviser on Indigenous biography.
that the work undertaken has been merely advisory. That is true only in the most legalistic sense. Each of the working parties is responsible for selecting a specified number of significant names for inclusion in the ADB, deciding on appropriate word lengths for each entry (ranging from 500 words for a basic entry to 6000 words for prime ministers), and recommending suitably qualified authors to be invited to prepare the entries. Such a protracted process requires exceptional commitment and expertise from members of the working parties over time and, ultimately, a consensual approach, due to the quotas with which they must work.

Those quotas have latterly attracted some misplaced criticism. Contrary to the criticism, which supposed that the quotas are based on occupational categories and thus open to manipulation, they are simply a matter of historical demography. They are statistically determined, on the basis of State and Territory populations at the census in the relevant period. Thus, each State working party receives an accurately enumerated proportion of the overall number of entries to be recommended for inclusion in the volume in question. (Specialist non-State-based working parties, on which more shortly, have small fixed quotas, determined by the general editor.) Quotas were introduced in the 1970s, along with many other significant methodological refinements to the ADB’s work. In this way, issues of ‘you have more than me’, which might have been a bone of contention nationwide, were effectively pre-empted.¹⁰

On average, the working parties have had about eight members. From the lists at the beginning of each printed volume, however, it will be apparent that they have varied in size, with the NSW Working Party usually the largest and, until recently, the Victorian the smallest. This may seem strange but everything depends on expertise, and in the case of Victoria, the expertise of Geoffrey Serle was unsurpassed, so that during his lifetime fewer members were needed. In Sydney, a larger membership of experts from various fields and representing at different times the universities at Armidale, Newcastle and Wollongong, has been thought necessary. At last count, there were 16 members of the NSW Working Party. Historians from the universities, historical associations and relevant professional bodies such as the law societies, and also independent scholars, serve on working parties throughout Australia, all of them approved in some way by the ADB, and in the case of the chairs, once upon a time formally appointed by the ANU.¹¹

Right now, the working parties seem to be in pretty good shape. To say that meetings can be stimulating would, in my experience, be an understatement.

¹¹ ‘ADB, Status and Operating Procedures’, ANU doc. 2623/1987, p. 3.
Even allowing for differences of style across the working parties, they all share one unusual feature: they consist in varying proportions of representatives of the relevant academic and professional fields, from literature to the law, from music to sport, and medicine to popular culture—that is, of people in a position to assess the achievements and significance of particular individuals from the period under consideration. It is a rare thing to observe and participate in such multi-skilled and interdisciplinary intellectual work. Perhaps it should be added that the work is all in the field of historical biography—that is, all those under consideration must be dead. The present rule is for 10 years.

Whatever the health of the working parties, the effectiveness of national collaboration depends in good part on the capacity and commitment of the chairs of the working parties and section editors. Again, the rules are not very informative; however, a quick check of the listings at the beginning of each volume of the *ADB* will show that many distinguished and experienced Australian historians have served in these positions, some for many years—for example, Geoffrey Bolton (Western Australia), Michael Roe (Tasmania) and Beverley Kingston (New South Wales), whose work on the *ADB* began when she was a student at Monash University in the 1960s, writing entries on Queensland pastoralists. Even with some sad losses, worthy successors have come forward: Ross Johnston and then Patrick Buckridge to replace Denis Murphy in Queensland, Peter Howell to replace John Playford in South Australia, and John Lack, then David Dunstan, to replace Serle in Victoria. For the record, these days, and probably from the early days, the duty of the section editor is to read and comment on all the entries for his or her section/State as they come in, and to advise the research editor in Canberra of any additional or overlooked sources and/or obvious errors. After the Canberra research editor has checked the facts and edited it, the entry goes on to the deputy general editor and then the general editor.12

The general editor sits at the apex of the national structure. Previous chapters have outlined how these wise and learned persons have gone about their business. As a long-time contributor to the *ADB*, I can confirm that the final stage, when the general editor wields the red pen, may well be the most unnerving! In this chapter, however, the question is not so much editorial effectiveness—which is vital and goes without saying—but noticing ways in which the national collaborative effort has been fostered by the general editor. No doubt styles have varied. My personal experience came mainly later with John Ritchie, who famously sent us all ‘abiding affection’.

No-one should delude herself that a major collaborative work of research and scholarship like the *ADB* can be done and maintained over a long period without

12 Beverley Kingston, personal communication (6 June 2010).
careful attention to the research base. Especially it needs to be emphasised that the work done is unpaid. Contributor payment is an old chestnut so far as the ADB is concerned—who, after all, would have to pay—and apart from exceptional circumstances, to which consideration has usually been given, the glory must suffice. Some later dictionaries have operated under a more straightforward national structure, and/or are funded by sources other than universities, so can afford payments for contributors, though these still seem quite meagre; but this is not, nor is it likely to be, ‘the Australian way’.

1985–1996: As a board member

It is not to be expected that things changed dramatically after 1985. The change, as expressed in the list of committee members on the preliminary pages of Volume 10 of the ADB (1986), was more a foretaste of things to come; however, the integration of the two earlier committees meant that the Editorial Board was still a large body, and it would take the fresh eye of John Ritchie, and another decade or so, to streamline it. Moreover, like the old National Committee, the new Editorial Board would not be meeting too often. Biennial meetings made the board meetings quite an event for the members, who came from all over Australia for them, and certain constraints meant it kept to its consultative brief during what were once day-long meetings. With Ken Inglis, who succeeded John La Nauze as third chair of the board in 1977, matters were dealt with calmly and smoothly. Later it would be alleged that John Ritchie’s aim was to get through the business by lunchtime.

Two new responsibilities came my way during the first decade of my membership of the revamped Editorial Board. Both increased my understanding of the delicate situation of the ADB as a project located within a single university but operational across the entire national system of research and scholarship. Adding to the delicacy, the single university had been an anomaly in the Australian university system, insofar as the research schools of the ANU were founded and funded on the basis of a block grant from the Commonwealth. Because of this, exceptional national responsibilities were expected of them; however, with the reduction of the block grant from 2001 onwards, the ANU was placed on a more equal footing with all other universities for funding, and

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13 ‘Financial Paper and Payments to Contributors’, National Committee discussion paper (July 1961). See also Minutes, National Committee meeting (12–13 August 1931), box 64, Q31, ADBA, ANUA, pp. 5–7. Geoffrey Serle raised the issue with the Editorial Board in 1975 of paying ‘some’ non-academic contributors in certain cases but there was no funding for this: Minutes, ADB Editorial Board meeting (29 October 1975), box 66, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.
ADB staff, as employees of the ANU, came under increasing pressure, which in turn meant that when it came to big decisions, it was a case of the old saying ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’.14

My first responsibility was the appointment of a new general editor. The appointment process took more than a year. First there had to be an ANU review to ensure that a senior position was justified. I played no part in this but, as anticipated, the outcome was positive, and things speeded up thereafter. Advertisements were placed internationally. A selection committee was formed; again, to my surprise and, to be honest, gratification, I was appointed to the committee, which consisted largely of senior academic staff of the ANU. Without betraying committee confidentiality, I can now say that although not exactly in the first flush of youth, I was still one of the younger members of the committee, and I still had a lot to learn about committee work. The field was good and the selection committee showed foresight when it recommended the appointment of John Ritchie, a well-published researcher and hard worker who became the ADB’s longest-serving general editor. It is perhaps another measure of his effectiveness that I was able to tolerate him calling me ‘Jilly’.

Ritchie’s appointment led to another job for me. With it, I saw at first hand the channels through which national collaboration operates on a regular basis. One winter evening in Sydney in 1990, John Ritchie, Beverley Kingston and I were walking up Crown Street after an ADB meeting when, at a pause for the traffic lights, John invited me to become section co-editor for New South Wales. Again, I was happy to accept, and formally speaking I served in that position until 1995 (though in reality for a shorter time, since I was away throughout the northern hemisphere academic year, 1994–95).15

As implied earlier, section editors must work quite hard (and, like most contributors to the ADB, on a voluntary basis). The NSW Working Party is usually responsible for sponsoring the most entries, so even as a co-editor there was a steady amount of work to be done. It was rare to receive less than 10 draft entries a month from Canberra for consideration and comment. The work was very interesting, but I fear I was not very good at it, not for want of commitment but because my knowledge base was not broad enough at the time. Moreover, at that stage I did not fully appreciate the needs of the research editors in Canberra, who could not be up and down to see if the requisite Mitchell Library holdings or those at some other local repository had been consulted.16

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14 The operation of block funding is too large a question to be pursued here. One reference, for which I thank Darryl Bennet, suggests concern within the ANU was rising by the late 1990s: in 2001 the Institute of Advanced Studies began trading part of its Commonwealth block funding in order to be eligible to compete for national competitive grants: ANU Annual Report (2001), p. 6, <http://www.anu.edu.au/mac/images/uploads/_AnnRpt2001.pdf>
16 For the position of research editor, see Cunneen, Chapter 4, this volume.

Perhaps I labour the point here. But it is another delicate fact that the effectiveness of national collaboration depends on the integration of expertise at every level. With six States, two Territories and a specialist working party on the military, it is a miracle that it has all worked so well for so long. Interestingly, the two most significant innovations of the early 1990s were the index to Volumes 1–12 and the CD-ROM, the former prepared in-house, the latter undertaken by Melbourne University Press, and both done with the approval of the board but with no input from it. They were a ‘touch on the times’, and a pointer to future needs. One thing I recall was running a very lively and up-to-date course in Australian women’s history at Macquarie University, based on the index. Another was the electric moment much later, at a meeting in Di Langmore’s office, when it emerged that when the CD-ROM was being produced, MUP had been granted all future electronic rights, a state of affairs that could have killed any possibility of an online edition of the ADB. Fortunately, MUP and its CEO, Louise Adler, and the ANU administration handled the situation constructively.17

Since 1996: As chair of the board

In 1996, following the retirement of Ken Inglis, I became the fourth chair of the ADB’s Editorial Board. Little did any of us realise what rough times lay ahead. More to the point, I was the first, and, to date, the only appointment from outside the ANU made to that position. I felt then, as I still do, that it was an appropriate appointment, as there was then no obvious Australianist on the staff of the History Program in RSSS to succeed Ken; but presumably not everyone saw it that way, at least not at first. On the one hand, I was working in Sydney and was seldom in Canberra. On the other hand, communications were quicker by then, and I had perspective—something that increasingly seemed to be lacking within the ANU.

Things went smoothly at first. I do not recall being called to do much more than chair meetings, and we were able to do one or two good things without rocking the boat—in particular, to introduce a system of ADB medals ‘for long and meritorious service’. All credit to John Ritchie for taking this innovation on board. He even went down to the Royal Australian Mint to get the specialists to strike the medals!18

17 Publishing Agreement between the ANU and the University of Melbourne for MUP (24 March 1993), and reference to it, John Ritchie/MUP (24 April 1996), copies of both documents in my possession; also in my possession, related documents, 2003–04, including a draft new agreement, with MUP. See ‘Publishing Agreement between MUP and ANU’ (3 August 2005).

18 The medal proposal was approved by the Editorial Board in July 2002, and the first awards were made by Professor Chubb at a ceremony at University House, Canberra, to Martha Campbell, Bede Nairn, John Ritchie and Gerry Walsh in October 2002. ANU Reporter, 33 (14 November 2002), p. 20.
Whether Ritchie was distressed that destabilisation was in the air, no-one can know for certain. I suspect he was. As payment by results took hold in cash-strapped universities in the 1990s, and the measurers of research output set to work, things began to look grim for the future of the ADB. Not only did the Australian Research Council (ARC) as the main funding body refuse to acknowledge that most contributions to the ADB are of necessity based on original research, Australian history being a comparatively new and immature field, but also, it seemed, that the rising generation would be discouraged from participation in its distinctive deliberative processes. This was despite our strenuous representations on behalf of the ADB.\footnote{Jill Roe and John Ritchie to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs (4 April 1997), and reply (30 April 1997), copies in my possession.}

Happily, the discriminatory regime no longer prevails. With an Australianist (Stuart Macintyre) heading the social science and humanities section of the ARC in 2002–04, the situation with regard to contributions was reversed; and as of 2011 there is a glimmer of hope for service on the working parties as well. Deride as we might the crude measures being advanced by the measurers of research output, it does seem that the addition of ‘esteem factors’ will mean that voluntary service on significant external committees is going to be counted, and that the voluntary principle will continue to sustain the ADB.

As chair of the Editorial Board, I was sometimes reminded of the great British constitutional theorist Walter Bagehot. In his classic work *The English Constitution* (1867), Bagehot distinguished between what he called its dignified and its efficient parts. In plain language, he explained that practical men were wrong to dismiss the dignified component of the English Constitution, and showed how both aspects were vital. Of the ‘dignified’ element, he wrote: ‘They raise the army, though they do not win the battle’. He also elaborated on the rights of the ‘dignified’ component—at that time, a constitutional monarchy. The monarchy, he wrote, has the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn.\footnote{Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Fontana Library, Collins, 1965), pp. 61–2, 110.}

Such an elevated analysis hardly applies to the Editorial Board of the ADB and its chair; however, it will be seen in successive prefaces to the volumes that general editors are always careful to thank the chair for support and advice. Whether they take it or not is beside the point. They are not obliged to. (There were one or two occasions when it was pointed out to me by officers of the ANU that my role was purely advisory.) Yet there may also be occasions when the board needs to do more than simply support and advise, and times when the chair must not only serve as a conduit for its views but also take the initiative.
Here I recount two important instances of the board doing more, both of which I was closely associated with. By 1999 it was obvious that the *ADB* must go online. The prior CD-ROM was difficult to use, and outdated technologically. As general editor, John Ritchie was cautious, though probably persuadable, but it took time, and several board meetings, the last of which followed a trip (by me) to New Zealand to attend the launch of the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* online at the New Zealand Historical Association conference in Christchurch in December 2001. It was arranged that the New Zealand general editor, Claudia Orange, and assistant editor, Ross Somerville, would come to Sydney and then to Canberra in June 2002, when the board was next meeting, to show us their work (a process partly funded by Macquarie University). The board was quickly and easily persuaded. There were practical problems, however: successive volumes of the *ADB* were planned, or in production, and adherence to the publishing schedule was deemed vital. More importantly, where would the money and expertise for such a big operation be found while the day-to-day work went on? Plainly the ANU could not provide it, being itself in financial straits, and still somewhat disoriented by the end of the research schools’ special funding arrangements.\(^{21}\)

In fact there was more to it than a ‘who pays?’ impasse. The only way the university could contemplate proceeding was if the *ADB* became available online on a user-pays basis. As this was not board policy, and anathema to me personally, a tussle ensued. Several bodies within the ANU thought of the *ADB* as a nice database that might enhance their own activities, provided it was profitable. There was no conception of the *ADB* as a continuing national research operation; and the idea of the ANU as custodian and promoter of the national interest supporting a free-to-air humanities project did not begin to play with harassed, middle-level bureaucrats. Indeed, at that stage, the idea that the project would enhance the image of the ANU seemed not to impinge. After one such encounter, I was so angry I let things stand for a month, and by then they had moved on.

The board stood firm. It understood the educational and other values of free-to-air. Thanks largely to a recently appointed board member, Janet McCalman, it found an answer to these problems in an association with a leading University of Melbourne e-team headed by Gavan McCarthy; and the in-house appointment of the wonderfully competent Darryl Bennet to prepare an application to the ARC clinched it. Later, as recounted in Chapter 6, a number of board members and *ADB* supporters undertook associated research projects (mine being mainly

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\(^{21}\) The *DNZB* online contained all 3049 entries from the five-volume *DNZB* and parallel Maori-language volumes. The project was located in the New Zealand Ministry for Culture & Heritage (<www.dnzb.gov.nz>). Ross Somerville to Jill Roe, email (10 December 2001), in my possession. Di Langmore was in favour of the online project from the beginning: Darryl Bennet to Jill Roe, personal communication (1 June 2010).
The ADB’s Story

with Miles Franklin’s bio-data) and persuaded their own universities to back the application, all of which was necessary for the only type of grant for which the project was eligible: an infrastructure grant. The board did not itself do the work, but without the board’s initiative and massive national collaboration, an online ADB would not have been possible. Receiving 70 million ‘hits’ a year, ADB online is now seen as a ‘jewel in the ANU’s crown’, and a growth point.22

A second example of board activism pertains to the production of the supplement volume of the ADB, the so-called ‘Missing Persons’ volume, which appeared with the full support of the ADB and MUP in 2005. There was debate about this as a necessary step in the modernisation of the ADB. Some thought an update of the early volumes, where much new research has been undertaken since the 1960s, should come first; however, the need for supplements had been canvassed as early as 1971, and the prior value of an overall catch-up volume was widely accepted.23

Again there was an impasse: it was a big, full-time job. It did not fit in to the long-term production schedule in Canberra. Who, then, could do it? Fortunately, an

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23 Draft Minutes, ADB Editorial Board meeting (7 June 1971), copy courtesy Chris Cunneen.
ideal editor for this volume was to hand. When Chris Cunneen retired as deputy general editor in 1996, he and his wife, Kerry Regan, moved to Sydney, where he became affiliated with the Department of Modern History at Macquarie University and was appointed an honorary senior research fellow. He was willing and able to face the challenge; the university was happy to sponsor the proposal; and in due course, with the involvement of the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales, and Stephen Garton, Beverley Kingston and myself to serve as associate editors, a substantial research grant was obtained. The project took almost four years and, again, the entire ADB system cooperated. As with the online project, a major collaborative effort was undertaken and some 500 names of people, significant in fields of history hitherto little explored or overlooked in existing volumes, especially in Indigenous and women’s history, were added to the total.24

Regarding Indigenous history, for reasons outlined earlier, the supplement proved timely. Thanks to its suitably extended time span, 1580–1980, and the opportunity to take in new biographical research, the volume was able to include 49 Indigenous biographies, 10 per cent of total entries in the volume, for which the various working parties are to be highly commended. At present, an estimated average of 1.9 per cent of all entries in the ADB are for Indigenous Australians.25

A final and sad instance of when ‘the buck stops here’ came into play with the incapacitating stroke in 2001 and premature death in 2006 of John Ritchie. At this point I would like to acknowledge that I have had the benefit of a preview of Geoffrey Bolton’s chapter on the Ritchie years. The reader cannot help but feel its elegiac quality. John’s death came, as many deaths do, unexpectedly. In normal circumstances, he would probably have retired in 2005, and I would have ceased to be the chair of the board even earlier.

As it was, the living soldiered on. Stopgap measures were put in place by the ANU, and the ADB staff, led by Langmore, coped splendidly. But increasingly it looked as if the bean-counters liked it that way. It took quite an effort, by Langmore herself if I recall correctly, for her to be adequately remunerated, albeit partially and on a temporary basis, for the extra work and responsibility that she had taken on as acting general editor; and at that point it seemed nothing more was going to happen, despite the support of successive directors of RSSS and the recommendations of the Roe, Bolton and Garton report described in

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24 Large Research Grants Scheme, application for 2001, copy in my possession. The project was awarded $272 000 over three years.
25 The average for the most recent volumes—ADB Volumes 13–17 plus the supplement—is 3.6 per cent. Material presented to ADB 2009 seminar by staff, copy courtesy Darryl Bennet.
Chapter 6. Yet a formal appointment to replace Ritchie was needed, if only as a matter of wage justice, but more importantly to forestall any possible drift; and here I felt a special responsibility.

Again, it took us all a lot of time and too many meetings with people who mostly had neither the power nor the motivation to move things along. Eventually, however, we (Di Langmore, Frank Jackson, then director of RSSS, and I) reached the vice-chancellor, Ian Chubb. It was a meeting worth recording, lasting at most two minutes. We had arrived full of trepidation, knowing this was the end of the road. Chubb waved us in, sat us down, picked up a recent volume of the *ADB*, and, opening it at the title page, said ‘where’s the ANU logo?’ One of us, probably Langmore, hastened to say that the omission would be remedied. Right, he said, that’s fine; arrange the advertisement. I have been a distant fan of Professor Chubb ever since.26

So things were back on track. In due course Langmore was appointed to (a fixed-term) general editorship, and it was my pleasure to be there when the volume she edited, Volume 17, was launched on 20 November 2007 by the governor of Victoria, David de Kretser, at the State Library of Victoria. The business of organising for Langmore’s successor, Melanie Nolan, in 2008, was by no means so troublesome. I should record that it was Ian McAllister, Frank Jackson’s predecessor as head of RSSS, who finally suggested we approach Professor Chubb directly, and Desley Deacon, as the then head of the History Program, who helped us through both processes.

With formal links between the *ADB* and the History Program re-established in 2003–04 and, after yet another review, its relocation in the newly established National Centre of Biography in 2008, a new chapter in the history of the *ADB* has opened. It is not hard to see institutional imperatives and intellectual developments at work, but it is difficult to predict the long-term effect of them. What is clear is that the *ADB* has survived when it might not have, the national collaborative network is intact and continuing, and esteem remains high. A new generation is taking command in Canberra, under circumstances far more decisive than those of 1985, and the changeover seems to be going smoothly, with plenty of youthful enthusiasm in evidence. My successor as chair of the Editorial Board, Tom Griffiths, will surely have much of interest to tell us about it all one day.

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26 Jill Roe to Vice-Chancellor Chubb (6 June 2003), and Request for support, copies in my possession. The meeting was held on 13 October 2003.

Tom Griffiths, W. K. Hancock Professor of History at the ANU, has chaired the Editorial Board since 2006

Photographer: Peter Fitzpatrick, ADB archives, 2010
My story perforce ends there. These days I serve as an ordinary member of the Editorial Board and as a member of the NSW Working Party; I hope to do so for a bit longer. With luck, I may ultimately be able to lay claim to having written 20 entries for the dictionary. Apart from an invitation from Bede Nairn in 1979 to write an entry on Stella Miles Franklin that set me off on a lifetime’s work, my favourite has probably been my entry in the supplement volume on Michael Sawtell, a SA-born radical and Emersonian who lived and worked in almost every State of Australia and never stopped talking. It has always come naturally to me to think of the ADB as a truly collaborative national project. Long may it flourish.

Professor Emerita Jill Roe AO has been a member of the NSW Working Party since 1990; a member of the ADB’s Editorial Board since 1985 and was its chair in 1996–2006. She is currently writing about South Australia’s Eyre Peninsula, where she spent her early years.

Profile

Jill Roe (b. 1940)

A graduate of the University of Adelaide (BA Hons, 1963) and ANU (MA Hons, 1965), Jill Roe was appointed a tutor in modern history at Macquarie University in 1967. She was already associated with the ADB as the author of the entry on Ada Cambridge, published in Volume 3 (1969), and has argued that she ‘grew with the ADB’. Since then she has written another 19 articles, two of which have led to published books: her entry on George Arundel, which resulted in Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939 (1986), and her entry on Miles Franklin, which led to a critically acclaimed, full-scale biography, published in 2008. She became professor at Macquarie in 1996 and, on her retirement in 2003, was appointed professor emerita.

A member of the Editorial Board from 1985, Roe served two terms as chair (1996–2006). In this role she vigorously advocated the online development of the ADB; she supported the idea of a supplementary volume of missing persons and, subsequently, worked on it as an associate editor; and she oversaw the appointment of a general editor (Di Langmore) to succeed John Ritchie. A member of the NSW Working Party from 1988, she served (1990–95) as joint section editor. In 2013 she is still an active member of both the Editorial Board and the NSW Working Party.

Roe believes that we are now living in a ‘golden age’ of biography, with its widening scope of inclusiveness, and argues that ‘what you learn from an individual biography may actually transform a whole field’. Moreover, if ‘you gather up cohorts and generations, then you get quite different understandings of social and cultural and intellectual dynamics in society’.

Profile

Geoffrey Bolton (b. 1931)

Professor Geoffrey Bolton has been involved with the *ADB* since 1959 when, with Frank Crowley, he helped to set up the WA Working Party. In 1961, in partnership with Ann Mozley, he compiled a biographical register of the WA Legislative Assembly, the second in a series of political registers. Somewhat unusually, as he moved between several Australian universities—he was also foundation professor and head (1971–73) of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of London—he has been a member of three working parties at various times: Western Australia (chairman in 1967–82 and 1996–2011), Victoria and Queensland.

Author of 84 entries, Bolton has contributed to every volume of the *ADB*. He has written award-winning biographies of Alexander Forrest (1958), Richard Boyer (1967), John Wollaston (1985) and Edmund Barton (2000)—all subjects of *ADB* articles by him—and is currently completing a biography of Paul Hasluck. His *ADB* entries also include people associated with the Kimberley, a region that he came to know well in his student days, among them Michael Durack and Lindsay Blythe as well as Forrest. He is known as a master of anecdote and his articles show an engaging familiarity with his subjects. His phenomenal memory and his oracular presence serve him well. As chair of the WA Working Party, he used all these attributes to advantage as he shared a story about a prospective candidate for inclusion. A great ‘fixer’, when the working party debates seemed endless, he would say ‘leave it with me’.

A graduate of the University of Western Australia (BA Hons, 1952; MA, 1954), Bolton won a Hackett Research Scholarship that took him to Balliol College, Oxford (BA, 1956; DPhil, 1961). His has been a stellar career, culminating in the chancellorship of Murdoch University (2002–06). He has published widely on many aspects of Australian history and was named Western Australian of the Year in 2006. Bolton observed that his father always advised him to leave a pub under his own steam rather than stay too long and be thrown out; on that basis, with some reluctance but much resolve, he retired from both the WA Working Party and the Editorial Board in 2011.

Sources: Geoffrey Bolton, in conversation with Melanie Nolan (8 June 2011). Citation for ADB Medal for Geoffrey Bolton (11 December 2012), NCB/*ADB* file.
Geoffrey Bolton, 2009

Photographer: Peter Fitzpatrick, ADB archives