As the first staff of the new University arrived to take up their appointments in 1950, Canberra University College was entering its third decade. The first two had been less than glorious. Despite the optimistic predictions of Sir Robert Garran and other members of the University Association, the College had to struggle from the outset. The timing of its birth had been unlucky: the modest budget of £3000 which provided for the appointment of the first staff scraped through Cabinet just a few weeks before Wall Street collapsed, and the ordinance which brought it into being was passed not long after the crash. Within two years the annual grant had been chopped in half, threatening its very survival. When the three full-time staff members had their appointments renewed for three years in 1934, they were warned that ‘if, during that period, the College ceases to exist, the engagement shall thereupon terminate’.

The College continued to exist because it was there, and because it met the needs of public servants based in Canberra who would otherwise have no satisfactory way of completing or improving their qualifications. Student enrolments started out at 34 in 1930 (though rather more attended lectures) and had grown to 163 by 1939, when the war put a halt to further increases. Most were public servants, and all were part-timers. They attended lectures dutifully, if often sleepily, between 5.00 and 9.00 pm, wherever the College was situated at the time: Telopea Park School and the Physics Laboratory at the Royal Military College, the Institute of Anatomy, the Hotel Acton, and then from 1948 in the Melbourne Building in the centre of Civic, none of which ever resembled a permanent home.

The staff too were mostly part-timers, drawn from the local population. They included some distinguished names: Laurie Fitzhardinge (who taught Ancient History), the Acting Commonwealth Statistician L.F. Giblin (Public Administration and Finance), and the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor H.F.E. Whitlam (Commercial Law), whose son Edward Gough appeared on the College’s books as a scholarship holder, though he was never actually enrolled for courses in Canberra. The pillars of the College were two full-time lecturers, J.F.M. Haydon (French and German) and L.H. Allen (English and Latin), whose joint contribution is remembered in the Haydon-Allen Building on the ANU campus.

The students enrolled for a range of courses in Arts, Commerce, Law and (in frequently) Science, including traditional university subjects along with courses directed towards the needs of public servants. Many found the going tough, and failure rates were high. English A was notoriously demanding: of the six students enrolled in 1935, three sat for the examination and only one passed (in a
supplementary). Economics I, the most popular subject in that year, had seventeen enrolments and seven examinees, of whom only three passed.

Students who managed to pass the requisite number of courses were awarded degrees or diplomas of the University of Melbourne. While the College had in most respects an independent existence, the ordinance which created it required that its courses be recognised by either of the well-established institutions in Sydney and Melbourne. The College Council opted for Melbourne, whose requirements for attendance at lectures in certain courses were less rigid than those of Sydney. Melbourne responded by passing a temporary regulation which recognised College courses for the purposes of examination. In return, the University received a fee of one guinea for each student examined in a particular subject. The regulation was approved initially for three years; then the College requested an extension for five, and was grudgingly granted two, followed next time by five.

Neither institution found this arrangement very satisfactory. The College, aware that it could not survive on its own, was never certain how long Melbourne's grace and favour would last; and Melbourne sometimes doubted that its grace and favour were deserved. Technically, the University of Melbourne reserved the right to vet all teaching appointments, and each faculty was entitled to visit the College and investigate the courses it had approved. But in practice the College was left to develop with minimal supervision, a notable exception being when one College lecturer was himself required to take the first year practical examination for the course he taught.

In 1940, faced with a request for yet another extension, the relevant professors in Melbourne put their heads together and concluded that the courses were of mixed quality. The professor of French thought Haydon's students were doing outstanding work. The professor of Mathematics considered that work in his subject was mediocre, and that the lecturers were leaning too heavily on his department for help. The professor of English drew a general lesson (that might have been relevant in later decades) that 'any Subordinate College is bound in time to become a nuisance to its Parent'. Overall, the professors decided that it would be unwise to convert the temporary regulation to anything more permanent; but they were reluctant to force the College onto its own resources.

Again the regulation was extended, this time until the end of the year following the end of the war, on the understanding that both parties would seek closer cooperation. This was in fact achieved, with better reporting by the College and more frequent liaison with the departments in Melbourne; so that when Garran begged for a further extension in 1947, Melbourne's Vice-Chancellor, J.D.G. Medley, jovially replied 'We would not for the world cast you off after so many years'.

That was no doubt reassuring (although Melbourne's magnanimity amounted in
practice to an extension for just one year); but it was small recompense for the efforts of Garran, Haydon, Allen and others who had worked so hard to make the College a success. Despite their dedication, there was no disguising the College’s invidious situation, or the fact that it was generally held in low esteem. The Canberra Times in 1945 referred pointedly to the success of New England University College in Armidale, remarking that Canberra University College had made no significant impression at all.

Apart from the practical problems of insufficient funding, inadequate accommodation and an uncertain future, the College suffered ignominy on three separate counts. First, it prepared students for external examination, which (according to one of the Melbourne professors) invariably injured the true university spirit and retarded its growth. Second, it was an institution intended chiefly for public servants, whose main object (according to another professor) was to improve their chances of promotion. But worst of all, the students, whoever they might be, were part-timers, and that was generally considered inimical to what ‘a real university’ was all about: they were there for the wrong reasons. Allen looked forward to a time when the students would attend the College primarily for cultural rather than practical reasons. Garran admitted that the College lacked the academic leadership to attract undergraduates who sought ‘the highest plane of University education, namely a search after knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself’.

The students themselves were well aware that they were missing out on something. ‘Only the hectic anti-social side of university life remains for us’, wrote one of them in 1937. ‘We cannot distinguish ourselves in winning scholarships and prizes, nor do we go in much for organised sport.’ There was an absence of any corporate spirit, which Allen blamed on the predominance of part-time staff. In 1944 the introduction of a course in Diplomatic Studies brought an infusion of students and money, but it did nothing to bring the College closer to university status. Nor did the sharp increase in student numbers which followed the end of the war and pushed staff and accommodation to breaking point.

In this gloomy context, the decision to establish a National University offered the brightest hope since the College’s inception. The College Council, staff and students had every reason for optimism, especially after they read in the Act that ‘the University may provide for the incorporation in the University of the Canberra University College’ and learnt that £20,000 had been set aside for the purpose.

They soon realised, however, that the Act placed the College in a new relationship of dependency, as it said nothing about when incorporation should take place and gave no guarantees that it should take place at all. And the University’s Interim Council (even though two of its members, Garran and Daley, were also members of the College Council) showed no signs of taking up what was for them no more than an option. On the contrary, the University’s responses to the College’s overtures were distinctly coy. The Academic Advisers, who had received negative reports about the College from Coombs, Wright, Rivett and others, were implacably opposed to incorporation, and they made it clear that they would consider coming only if the Interim Council stood firm on the issue. Oliphant was opposed to any form of undergraduate teaching in the foreseeable future. Hancock was more
accommodating, acknowledging that the link between research and undergraduate teaching at the highest level was a good thing, and that there might be a natural coming together of the two, perhaps in fifteen years’ time. But in the meantime, it would be ruinous to the chances of a genuine research university to be associated with ‘a University College for pass men’. Copland, anticipating trouble, decided to use the views of the Advisers to resist the local pressure for incorporation; but he concluded that, in the long term, some form of association would evolve that would leave the University’s research activities ‘uncontaminated’ by the work of the College.

Garran was deeply disappointed, telling the crowd assembled at the Commencement Ceremony for 1948 that ‘Instead of being the parent of the University, the College finds itself, for the time being, a sort of poor relation’. Ironically, confirmation of its inferior status provided unexpected opportunities. As prospects of an immediate association with the University receded, the College’s Council seized the initiative and approached the government for increased funding, on the understanding that money was available for the purpose and that the College had to get itself into shape for eventual incorporation. What was now needed, Garran told the Minister, was a principal and professor with outstanding academic qualifications and sufficient status to attract and hold other staff members; and eight additional lecturing appointments, to open up new fields and handle a student population which now numbered well over three hundred.

Determined lobbying paid off. The government increased the College’s grant to the £20,000 it had asked for, and Garran and his colleagues set about planning for the future. Hancock during his 1948 visit offered some detailed advice about what a real university looked like and came up with some possible names for the position of principal. Soon the College had recruited one of them, Herbert Burton, who took up duty early in January 1949.

Burton’s appointment as Principal and Professor of Economic History pleased everybody, except perhaps a few friends who wondered what he had let himself in for. Now approaching 50, he was short in stature, with a genial, striking face and an engaging manner. Everyone seemed to know him by the name his wife had given him, ‘Joe’. A Queenslander by birth and affection, he had distinguished himself as a rugby footballer and Rhodes scholar. At Oxford he had spent time with Hancock, and the two had become close friends in Adelaide in the late 1920s. For nearly twenty years, he was Senior Lecturer, then Associate Professor, at the University of Melbourne, where he pioneered the teaching of Economic History in Australia. For much of that time he had served under Copland, whose association with the ANU he regarded as one of the attractions of the Canberra job. Burton brought to his new position astuteness, sensitivity and integrity. His appointment made the office of principal immediately respectable; and his insider’s knowledge of the University of Melbourne turned out to be of great value to the College when it came to getting things done.

The Principal’s first task was to recruit new members of staff. These were initially to be lecturerships, but the College Council, unable to find suitable people and buoyed by the promise of Burton’s arrival, asserted itself in defiance of Treasury and

Herbert ‘Joe’ Burton, soon after his arrival in Canberra in 1949. Photograph by Fred Bareham.
advertised for chairs. The first to be appointed (after the Council had assured itself through ASIO that he was not a communist) was a Melbourne historian, Charles Manning Hope Clark. Then came L.F. Crisp to a chair of Political Science, H.W. Arndt to Economics, and A.D. Hope to English. Burton regarded these four as the ‘foundation professors’. Together they gave the College a new beginning.

As for the University, if anyone asked at the time whether the College would ever be a part of it, the answer was likely to be ‘yes, but not yet’.

**College types**

Manning Clark came from Melbourne to Canberra on 29 September 1949 to take up the chair of History. The date stuck in his memory. Melbourne had made him, but now its intellectual self-confidence seemed to stultify, and he had to escape the temptations of the Carlton bars. Canberra offered uncertainty, but also the opportunity to make a new start on his grand project to write a history of Australia.

Clark later remembered those early years at the College as some of the most rewarding of his career. Canberra may have lacked tradition, but there was no shortage of intellectual stimulation: from his fellow professors, Arndt, Crisp, and Hope; from other members of the History Department, Don Baker and Laurie Gardiner; from Murray Todd in English, Alan Donagan in Philosophy, Burgess Cameron in Economics and Brian Beddie in Political Science; and from others outside the College, especially the grazier poet David Campbell who shared Clark’s thirst for meaning and lust for life. While Crocker was recoiling from the horrors of the Hotel Canberra, Clark quickly found that the Hotel Civic, just across the road from the Melbourne Building in which the College was then located, was no less alluring than the watering holes he had left in Melbourne.

The whole staff, clerical as well as academic, congregated each morning and afternoon in their tea room, where they functioned as a lively community. Two or three times a year the Staff Association organised a dinner for the academic staff and their wives (there were as yet no husbands), at which various of the company let their hair down and Fin Crisp organised party games, including ‘pass the orange’. At Easter 1953 a fire in the Melbourne Building left the College homeless, and hastened its move into a disused workers’ hostel in Childers Street, a few hundred metres away, where it remained for almost a decade. This accommodation, although primitive, encouraged the sense of intimacy and solidarity which already existed among the College staff. So too did awareness of the University, with its relatively luxurious buildings and sanguine prospects, over on the hill.

Members of the College and the University ran into one another at committee meetings
or social gatherings. Although Canberra’s population more than doubled during the 1950s (reaching 56,000 by 1961), it remained a small town, with all the benefits and drawbacks that small towns tend to offer. R.F. Brissenden, who joined the College in 1953 as a Temporary Lecturer in English, recorded his misgivings in ‘The Canberra Blues’:

Go east or west in this fair city, of one thing you may be sure:  
You’ll see the same damned faces that you saw the day before.

There was a busy round of parties, often beginning at 8.00 p.m. and ending with a large supper around 11.00. Sawer recorded in his diary boisterous evenings at the Clarks’, including one where a student in the Diplomatic Studies course told bawdy stories and Sawer shocked one of the ladies with the song ‘A soldier told me before he died’. Academics from the two institutions came together for film nights and concerts in private homes, attended dances in the Albert Hall, and performed on the stage of the Canberra Repertory. On weekdays their wives met and talked at the local shops, perhaps about the local school or the housing problem, and on weekends their families shared picnic spots at Weston Park or along the Murrumbidgee River.

Nevertheless, despite many pleasant social and intellectual contacts, there was an uncomfortable sense of difference between people in the University and the ‘College types’, as Sawer called them. At the installation of Lord Bruce as Chancellor in 1952, when rain forced the ceremony inside the Albert Hall, someone omitted to reserve seats for members of the College. This left some College academics fulminating for years about ‘A.N. bloody U.’. Everybody knew that the University, collectively, regarded the College as ‘on trial’, and that some of the natural scientists in particular were dismissive of the inhabitants of Childers Street, irrespective of their individual merits.

Condescension was just one of many burdens members of the College had to bear. Another was the relationship with the University of Melbourne, which in 1951 was extended for two years, then for three, and year by year after that. Burton spoke warmly of relations between the two; but it remained frustrating for College professors and lecturers to have to teach courses which had been developed elsewhere and to seek approval for their own courses from a higher authority. Then there was the extra workload, including the annual visits to Melbourne to share the marking of examination papers from Canberra and Melbourne candidates and ensure that standards were much the same. From the point of view of the Professorial Board in Melbourne, the association was a nuisance, as it had been in the past, entailing extra work for no obvious benefit.

Hope and Arndt complained that the College was failing to attract good students. In 1950 there were just under 350 students in all, and in 1957 over 450. The admission of the first full-timers in 1954 was cause for celebration, though by 1957 they still comprised fewer than 10 per cent of the overall student population.

One solution to the part-time problem was to make the College residential. In 1950 it took over ‘Gungahlin’, an old two-storey homestead beyond the northern outskirts of town. This provided accommodation for eighteen men, most of them cadets in the Department of External Affairs who were enrolled in the Diplomatic Studies course.

‘Gungahlin’ acquired a corporate spirit of its own and a place in College and
University folklore one night in 1951, when the staid Warden happened to be out of town. Jim Davidson, who was then a resident, was celebrating with three cadets the appointment of one of them, Richard Woolcott, to a diplomatic posting in Moscow. After an evening on the town, they rolled up in front of the homestead about midnight in Davidson’s Riley tourer, continued their revels in the common room with much din and bawdy songs, and brought proceedings to a climax around 1.00 a.m. by chopping down the flagpole at the front of the building with the evident intention of using it as a battering ram. The Warden, returning from Sydney, was livid; Davidson, unrepentant, was asked to find accommodation elsewhere; Woolcott made amends with an apology and £5 towards the cost of a new flagpole, before setting out the next day for Melbourne on his way overseas to begin a distinguished career which culminated 37 years later in his appointment as head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He was one of several students in the Diplomatic Studies course, including Murray Bourchier, Peter Henderson and Nicholas Parkinson, who achieved later distinction. ‘Gungahlin’, too small and distant, was abandoned as a residential college in 1954. Students were then accommodated in Turner Hostel Narellan House and, later, Lennox House, all within walking distance of Childers Street.

The diplomatic cadets were exposed to teachers of remarkable talent. Over forty years later Sir Nicholas Parkinson remembered especially Arndt’s seminars on international economics, always challenging and often developing into a row; and Clark, with ‘enormous personal charm, ... infuriating and stimulating’, and sounding
'an outrageous raspberry at life'. While Clark’s approach to history offered much to disagree with, Parkinson welcomed the change from the aridity of the History Department at the University of Sydney, where he had earlier been a student. The College showed what a real university ought to be like.

The course in Diplomatic Studies came to an end in 1953, after the government decided it was no longer required. Later students showed little sign of a communal feeling, except perhaps at the revues which were usually held each year from 1955, and which gave students the opportunity to get their own back at their lecturers and members of the College Council. From 1949 the Students’ Association published a cyclostyled newssheet, which in 1952 changed its name to Woroni, an Aboriginal word ‘meaning ‘mouthpiece’. The Association boasted in 1956 that this included ‘intelligent and controversial articles and abusive but provoking attacks on authority in general’. Under the guidance of a few dedicated editors, Woroni grew by the end of the decade into a twelve-page publication. Several clubs and societies emerged during these years, including the Canberra University Dramatic Society, the Student Christian Movement, and the Law Society, whose members (Woroni claimed) considered themselves a cut above the rest.

Despite Burton’s efforts to breathe life into the student body, most undergraduates remained weighed down by an earnestness of purpose. The staff kept the College vibrant. By 1957 there were 40 full-time academics, spread across a dozen disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Except for a course in Zoology, offered to meet the needs of the CSIRO, there was no longer any teaching in the natural sciences.

Many staff members were leaders in their respective fields. Apart from Arndt and Clark, there was Crisp, working on his biography of Ben Chifley, which was published in 1961, and Hope, whose first collection of poems, The Wandering Islands, was published in 1955. John Fleming, who joined the staff in 1949 and served as Robert Garran Professor of Law from 1955 to 1960, went on to a chair at the University of California at Berkeley. Hans Bielenstein, appointed Professor of Oriental Languages in 1952 on C.P. FitzGerald’s recommendation, later accepted a chair at Columbia University.

The College grew in strength and reputation. In 1957 the Committee on Australian Universities, chaired by the head of the British Universities Grants Committee, Sir Keith Murray, remarked that it was now ‘a mature institution’ with ‘a highly qualified and enthusiastic staff’, and recommended that it be given independence from Melbourne and allowed to expand. As a result its annual grant grew from £259,000 in 1958 to £440,000 the following year. The professoriate grew from twelve to eighteen, with new chairs in Botany, Chemistry, Geology, Physics, Zoology and Statistics. For the first time, the departments were organised into faculties of Arts, Economics, Law and Science. The committee also recommended that the College be allocated a permanent site close to the ANU. This was promptly implemented with a grant of 138 acres, 40 of which were

Diplomatic Cadets Phil Peters, Bill Morrison, Dick Woolcott and Tony Powell participate in a bushfire drill in the grounds of ‘Gungahlin’ in 1950.
By courtesy of Geoff Mansall.
The Canberra University College Commencement Ceremony in Albert Hall, 27 March 1952.

Above: Sir Robert Garran confers the degrees; the Vice-Chancellor of the new University, Copland, sits immediately to his right.

Right: the graduands wait to receive their degrees. The photograph depicts the approximate enrolment ratio of over eight men to one woman.

Photographs by L.J. Dwyer.
National Library of Australia.

extracted from the original grant to the University. Before long a site consultant had been appointed and plans were on the drawing board for the College’s first permanent building, which was to house the Faculty of Arts.

In their discussions with representatives of the College and the University, Murray and his colleagues asked searching questions about what sort of relationship should exist between the two institutions. In both places some staff were alarmed. But Murray stopped short of recommending amalgamation, suggesting instead that the matter be given ‘very serious consideration’ and pointing out that the establishment of two universities in a city as small as Canberra should not be lightly undertaken. Nor did he comment on the form amalgamation might take, except by saying that ‘it should not pass the wit of man to devise constitutional arrangements which might suit the situation in Canberra in a manner which would be acceptable to all concerned’. That remark resounded around campus meeting rooms for many years to come.
Amalgamation

When Murray delivered his report to the government in September 1957, men had already been applying their wits to the problem for several years. So far they had made little progress towards amalgamation, and if anything had moved in the opposite direction.

So long as the Australian National University Act continued to provide for the possible incorporation of the College, the relationship between the two institutions would be open to debate. Burton wanted some form of amalgamation, and most of his staff agreed. But when the College initiated discussion in the early 1950s, the University was inclined to play for time, suggesting that for the next few years at least the relationship should be, in Oliphant's phrase, 'spiritual rather than physical'. For the College, looking forward to increasing numbers of students and with nowhere to house them, the issue was urgent. If it was not to join the ANU, it wanted to develop into a fully-fledged and independent university.

Within the University, opinions were divided. Some, including Davidson and Sawyer, argued that teaching and research went hand in hand, that University staff could only benefit by exposure to undergraduates, and vice versa. Hancock, when he arrived, made sympathetic noises about a closer association, and gave practical evidence of cooperation through his 'History Consortium'. Apart from the academic reasons for amalgamation, proponents offered arguments about sharing resources, especially library facilities.

But for every argument in favour, there seemed to be half a dozen against. Butlin and Passmore, deeply committed to their own demanding research projects, denied that there was an essential link between teaching and research. Partridge suggested that incorporation would lead other universities to conclude that the ANU experiment had failed. Many feared that the University's national character would inevitably be diminished. With the notable exception of Woolley, the natural scientists tended to see incorporation as a threat to research, with undergraduates competing for bench space in the laboratories. Most of these arguments were presented as matters of principle; but some staff openly voiced their concerns about the quality of the College relative to the University and of College staff relative to themselves. Before the College introduced undergraduate courses in science, Oliphant anticipated that it would attract only inferior staff who, in the event of amalgamation, would be foisted on the University. And once the Science Faculty had been formed, he remarked privately that most College staff would not qualify as research fellows at the ANU. This was an overstatement of the kind to which Oliphant was prone; but it reflected a feeling widespread among his colleagues that the University had little to gain from union and much to lose.

Besides the two institutions there were other interested parties, including residents of Canberra represented through the local press, politicians who asked the occasional question in parliament, various departments of government, and most important of all, Prime Minister Menzies, who kept a close watch on the debate. When it appeared
in 1954 that the matter was about to come before Cabinet, the University suggested to the College that they jointly convene a working party to advise on future arrangements. After balancing the arguments for and against incorporation, the working party recommended that the two institutions should be associated for a trial period of five years, which would allow the College time to mature, and give both parties time to determine whether or not a ‘permanent and organic union’ was likely to work.

This was a cautious proposal; yet its immediate effect was to galvanise opinion among staff in the University against any form of association. At a joint meeting of the social science schools, the two faculties came down decisively against incorporation, resolving instead to encourage the College in its bid for independence. The Board of Graduate Studies then declared that a decision to incorporate would require complete unanimity in the academic community: in other words, that the question should be indefinitely postponed. This left the College, whose arrangement with the University of Melbourne was about to expire, stranded, and its staff perplexed.

Wise heads urged circumspection. Sawyer warned his colleagues that they should try to avoid sounding ‘snobbish, pharisaical, condescending or impertinent’ (while suggesting that this was exactly how they had sounded to date). Coombs, a strong advocate of incorporation, tried to arrange a compromise based on some form of minimal association which would at least ensure that the ANU retained a say in how the College developed, warning his senior colleagues in the University that, if the institutions were unable to resolve their difficulties, the problem would probably be solved at a political level. But opponents of amalgamation within the University stood firm; and many College staff, responding to what could reasonably be interpreted as a snub, abandoned their own support for amalgamation to emphasise the problems the College was likely to encounter from association with the University. Now the College pointed out that its undergraduates would be regarded as second-class citizens; that in periods of financial stringency the research schools would have the lion’s share of the budget; and that, all in all, it too had much to lose.

Coombs was right. If the academics were unable to reach agreement on some form of association, the Prime Minister was ready to do the job for them, especially after Murray had made it clear that something could and should be done. Early in 1958 Menzies summoned representatives of the two institutions, along with the Minister for the Interior and three senior public servants (two of whom, Sir Allen Brown and Professor K.H. Bailey, were members of both Councils), to a round table discussion about their future relationship. Menzies at the outset drew the bottom line: ‘There is a very wide-spread feeling in Australia, rightly or wrongly—I do not sit in judgment on it—that Canberra is a spoilt darling; that if you have a national university, the sky is the limit; but a university in another place must battle for itself’. How, therefore, could a second university be justified? His guests were less inclined to confront this political problem than to show the Prime Minister that amalgamation would be wrong in principle and practice. After a long day, the meeting adjourned without reaching any firm conclusions, Menzies merely commenting that he and the Minister for the
Interior would think about what had been said and that he had not had such an enjoyable day for quite some time. The academics might not have come away so pleased: if it had not been clear in the past that their future would be influenced by political considerations, it certainly should have been now.

But the political considerations were not entirely straightforward. Menzies, having to decide between disappointing academic Canberra and offending the rest of Australia, and confronted with a Cabinet divided on the issue, took his time. For nearly two years the issue was left undecided, during which the proponents of independence won additional recruits. Even Coombs, lobbied on the golf course by his friend Crisp, conceded that the government should grant the College independence, and urged the Prime Minister to take into account its recent progress. Menzies, on a visit to England, also discussed the matter with Sir Keith Murray, who confirmed his earlier view that two universities in Canberra could not be justified; and the new Australian Universities Commission, a body created as a result of the Murray Report, concluded unanimously that there should be just one institution.

So when Menzies made his long-expected announcement a week before Christmas in 1959, the outcome was hardly surprising: ‘We have decided in favour of association’. The government, he explained, could not justify two universities in a small town at a time when other cities with larger populations had more pressing demands; and if Canberra University College were given independence, it would either remain a second-rate institution or provide costly facilities for research which would duplicate those of the ANU. There were also the academic benefits of amalgamation for researchers and students alike.

Crisp, anticipating the decision two months earlier, denounced it as a shotgun wedding; but it could better be described as an arranged marriage between dissenting parties. The main element of surprise was the extent to which the government had shown itself to be the final arbiter in matters affecting the two institutions. Academics might think what they liked; the decision was clearly non-negotiable.

The same applied to the timetable. Menzies told the parties that he wanted to introduce legislation into parliament the following year so that the amalgamated body could come into being from the beginning of 1961. To achieve this the University and the College would need to agree on ways and means by mid-March, just three months from the date of his announcement. The government’s requirements were general: one university with a single governing body, with common degrees conferred by a common authority, and as far as possible, a common administration. Other than this, the details of association were for the institutions themselves to determine; and if they were unable to reach agreement on specific issues, Menzies himself would be happy to decide.

Whatever the long-term outcome of the ultimatum, the Prime Minister had certainly put a dampener on the Christmas and New Year holidays of several academics and administrators. There was a flurry of activity, with meetings and report writing starting just before Christmas and continuing through to mid-February.

The challenge was formidable: to forge a link that would work in theory and practice between two institutions that differed significantly in functions and size. At
the beginning of January 1960, the University had a total of 682 staff, 177 of whom were academics or senior administrators; the comparable numbers for the College were 164 and 94. The ANU had 111 PhD candidates and no undergraduates; the College had 665 undergraduate enrolments (133 of whom were full-timers), 29 Masters' candidates and none for the degree of PhD. The annual running expenditure for the University was approaching four times that of the College. Yet Menzies had spoken of 'association' rather than 'incorporation', and this gave the College, theoretically at least, equal status at the negotiating table. This appalled Oliphant, who had assumed that the University would be the dominant party, 'lifting the poor sister institution, academically speaking, into its auspices'.

The University approached the negotiations on the premise, as agreed by the Board of Graduate Studies, that 'whatever form the academic structure took, it was essential that the fundamental principle, that the integrity and independence of research which had been provided for in this University and was Australia's only original adventure in the university field, be preserved'. The safest way of achieving this was to ensure that the research schools maintained the maximum degree of independence, within the limits defined by the Prime Minister's statement. The College approached the negotiations determined above all to ensure that association did not mean subordination. This too could be avoided through independence. In other words, the newlyweds, as Laurie Fitzhardinge put it, decided to occupy separate rooms.

The University's anxieties were evident during discussions about the role of the proposed professorial board. In most universities the board was the supreme academic body, comprising the professorial staff and responsible for high academic policy. Tradition suggested that there should be such a body at the ANU. But if the College continued to grow at its current rate, the College professors would eventually be able, as Oliphant put it, 'to outvote the interests of the Research Schools'. Best therefore to have two academic boards, one for each part of the University, and each reporting directly to Council. The College readily agreed. The negotiators also agreed that there should also be a professorial board for the whole University to resolve possible conflicts on academic matters; but it would meet rarely and have no prescribed policy-making role.

John Fleming, Professor of Law in the College, warned that this arrangement was risky: if there was no dominant academic body, important academic matters might well be determined by the Council and the executive. Later years proved him right: the ANU Council often seemed more powerful and assertive than councils and senates in other universities. Oliphant and his colleagues, by splitting academic policy-making in two, had protected the research schools from anticipated domination by the teaching professors; but in so doing they had opened the way for a non-academic body to fill a policy-making void.

As happens when constitutions are being made, matters of terminology assumed large importance. The University was determined to maintain the identity of the research schools by giving them a collective name. The term 'institute', commonly used to describe research organisations in Australia, such as the highly respected
Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne, immediately suggested itself and won general approval. The Princeton Institute for Advanced Study inspired the rest of the title, so that the research schools, while retaining their individual names, would now be identified as the Institute of Advanced Studies (the plural having overtaken the singular) in the ANU.

This much was easy. But what about the teaching faculties? The College representatives at the negotiating table preferred to call them simply ‘The Faculties’, without assigning a collective name. The University representatives realised that this would not do: if the research schools were identified as the Institute while the faculties had no collective name, Canberra University College would become ‘The University’, while the Institute would be pushed to the periphery. The University insisted and the College reluctantly gave in. Burton wanted to retain the name College, but nobody agreed. Instead, his colleagues suggested that their part of the University be titled ‘The School of General Studies’. It was an unhappy choice, reminiscent of generalist courses in humanities then being offered to technology and science students at the University of New South Wales; and although members of the research schools had not chosen the term, it was they who in future years tended to get the blame.

One of the most difficult issues was what to do about the library. The University Library, which currently housed some 150,000 volumes including the extensive Oriental Studies collection, had been assembled to serve the specific needs of the research schools. The College Library had about 50,000 volumes, selected chiefly to serve the needs of undergraduates. The University Library was catalogued under the Bliss system; the College Library followed Dewey. Both collections were housed inadequately in temporary accommodation, and both were bursting at the seams. Two new buildings were planned; and in the case of the University, funds had already been allocated and a contract let for a building with plenty of room for books but limited accommodation for readers, and certainly insufficient to seat large numbers of undergraduates.

University and College representatives agreed that (administratively at least) there should be a single University Library under one University Librarian; but they differed as to the physical form it should take. Crisp was adamant: undergraduates should have free run of a large, well-stocked library, comparable with the best national collections, and located in the teaching part of the campus. The University, however, was reluctant to abandon its claim to a separate research library, which was after all a bird in the hand. It therefore submitted a proposal for two separate libraries, one (as planned) for research, especially in the social sciences; the other for undergraduate work, with a limited collection of books but plenty of room for readers. Burton was angry, telling the Prime Minister that the University’s scheme discriminated against undergraduates and contradicted the government’s picture of an institution of national standing.

The parties were also unable to agree on who should be responsible for the award of PhDs and higher doctorates. Representatives of the University argued that doctorates were one of the main ways in which the quality of the institution would be
judged, and that therefore the Institute should retain sole control. College negotiators, while accepting Institute responsibility in the short term, anticipated a time when the School of General Studies would award at least as many doctorates as the Institute, at which point the degree should become the responsibility of a joint body. The University wanted its powers enshrined in the new Act of Parliament; the College wanted the matter to be determined by statute, which could readily be changed. Both parties refused to budge.

Yet despite these and other points of conflict, negotiations proceeded with remarkable harmony and speed. Manning Clark gave credit to Melville: 'In a subject where passion, prejudice and vested interest could have caused ship-wreck your work helped greatly to avoid such a disaster'. Burton too was a voice for moderation, while other senior academics and administrators helped smooth the way. Within two months of Menzies making his announcement a joint submission was ready to present to government. This provided for a single Council, with 36 to 38 members, and a Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar, who would have responsibility for the University as a whole. Below them, the University would be in two parts, the Institute of Advanced Studies and the School of General Studies, each with its own board and administrative structure. Burton would retain his title of Principal of the School. The Vice-Chancellor, his Deputy and the Principal would all be members of both academic boards. The Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies (which quickly became known by its unhappy acronym, BIAS) would also comprise the heads of the research schools, the heads of departments and three members of the School of General Studies. The Board of the School (BSGS) would consist of all its professors, along with three members of the Institute. In this way, each Board would be kept in touch with the work of the other.

Menzies settled the outstanding issues peremptorily. On the matter of doctoral degrees, he prescribed a compromise, giving the Institute legislative responsibility for the next decade, after which the question would be dealt with by University statute. With regard to the library, he determined that for reasons of time and money the plans to build a research library close to the social science schools should proceed, thereby implying that an undergraduate library would eventually be built near the School of General Studies. Obviously, the Prime Minister's motives in forcing amalgamation were not chiefly economic: two libraries would cost in the long term much more than one.

The arrangements proposed in the submission, along with the Prime Minister's additions, were promptly approved by government and passed through the parliament with little dissent. Gough Whitlam, the newly elected Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, lamented the demise of a purely research institution, and his colleague Kim Beazley protested that the measure conflicted with the wishes of both institutions. This, of course, was true. But given that amalgamation was inevitable, at least the University and the College were given the constitution they had asked for, incorporating the key feature of independence from one another.

How well the arrangements would work remained to be seen. Would the School of
General Studies, as Oliphant predicted, grow to swallow up the available money, leaving the research schools to die? Would the old College, as the CUC Students’ Association anticipated, become an unwanted lean-to of the ANU? There were also optimists, who saw the potential for informal cooperation among schools, faculties and departments, and who looked forward to the University achieving a national status in teaching as well as research.
The University in 1960

An aerial view of the campus, looking towards Black Mountain, about 1960.

Students

- Bachelor: 681
- Non-degree: 120
- Masters: 51
- PhD: 127
- Diploma and Certificate: 10

Undergraduates by Faculty and Gender

- Arts
- Economics
- Law
- Science

Origins of Postgraduate Students

- ACT
- NSW
- Victoria
- Other Australia
- Overseas

FEMALES

MALES
Staff

SGS - ACADEMIC 11%
IAS - ACADEMIC 11%
SUPPORT STAFF* 30%

IAS Academic Staff*

RSHEYSS 30%
JCSMR 31%
RSPACS 19%
RSSS 21%

* Includes administration, library, maintenance, laboratory staff, research and departmental assistants

* Excludes research assistants


COUNCIL

Professorial Board

Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies

Research Schools
John Curtin School of Medical Research
Research School of Physical Sciences
Research School of Social Sciences
Research School of Pacific Studies

Board of the School of General Studies

Faculties
Arts
Economics
Law
Science

University Library
Hall of Residence
University House

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