said Ross Hohnen when we first talked to him after starting work on this history. That sounded like good advice. After all, Hohnen had been appointed to the staff of the University soon after its inception, and had served it as Registrar, later as Secretary, for over 25 years. If anyone knew where best to start, surely he would be the one.

We omitted to ask where the Basic Papers were to be found. With a name like that, they would surely turn up before long. Weeks passed, then months, and still no Basic Papers. Submerged beneath other papers, we forgot his advice. Then, two or three years into the project, a senior administrator in the Chancery invited us to rummage through a cupboard full of documents to see if there was anything worth keeping. There, along with several volumes of ancient minutes, was a binder with ‘Basic Papers (with Index)’ neatly written on the spine. The contents all dated from the years 1946 to 1948: a Cabinet agenda which authorised the relevant Minister to proceed with a bill to establish a national university in Canberra; the Minister’s second reading speech introducing the Australian National University Bill; various memorandums and reports about the structure of the new institution and its component parts; and minutes of various meetings held in Australia and England. These were some of the key documents which got the University started and gave it its shape. By the 1990s they had evidently ceased to matter.

The ‘loss’ of the Basic Papers symbolises how the ANU has forgotten its past; or more precisely, how its corporate memory has been receding, as in any institution when one generation of makers gives way to the next. We hope, immodestly, this book will serve as a substitute for lost corporate memory and therefore be of use to the University’s current and future makers as they reflect on the purposes of the institution and plan its future directions.

The ANU began as a university unique in Australia and the world, and — after 50 years — so it remains. Part of our story is about the reasons for that uniqueness, and how and to what extent the University has maintained its singularity in specific political and educational environments where pressures towards orthodoxy tended to prevail. Another part relates more generally to the nature of institutions: how they are founded, how they adapt to change and how they function. It is about what H.C. Coombs called ‘the fragile pattern’: the relationship between people and the institutions they create.

Coombs is one of many people who figure prominently in our story. Where possible, we have addressed them as they were and are known around the campus, sometimes changing the style to fit the context. Hence there are inconsistencies, as
there are in everyday usage. Academic titles have been omitted throughout. The index, which gives the full personal names of people mentioned often in the text, should remove any ambiguities.

The book acknowledges the University’s extensive contributions in research, teaching and, in recent years, performance in the creative arts. Yet it is not, and was never intended to be, a 50-year report, comparable with the University’s annual reports to the governor-general. While we have tried to portray the breadth and depth of campus activities, we have not attempted to cover every department or research project, or to mention in a systematic way outstanding students, dedicated administrators and distinguished scholars.

Although this book has been commissioned and entirely funded by the University to mark its fiftieth anniversary, it is not an ‘official’ history, in the sense that it offers an authorised view of the University’s past. A History Committee, whose members are listed on an earlier page, has watched our progress and offered helpful advice, but without once telling us what the book should or should not say.

The members of that committee are first on our list of people to thank, especially the sub-committee of readers, Paul Bourke, Anthea Hyslop and Ken Inglis. Ian Ross read the whole draft and commented meticulously and humorously correcting more slips than we care to enumerate, alerting us to the occasional solecism, and unintentionally reminding us that while chemists might make good historians, the opposite rarely applies. Ross Hohnen took a fatherly interest in the project, provided much detail on the years to the mid-1970s, and tolerated our wayward interpretations.

We thank archivists and librarians in many institutions, especially the ANU’s Central Records staff, who have met our requests cheerfully and efficiently over some four years, and who were even gracious on the one occasion we created havoc by misplacing a file. For assistance with photographs we thank the University’s Public Affairs Division, Stuart Butterworth in the John Curtin School, and the Canberra Times. We also thank the several people who have looked after our administrative and technical needs, especially Diana Nelson, Jane Sutton and Donna Webster; and Phil Telford, from the Planning Unit, who provided statistical information.

In addition to those already mentioned, the following people have commented on large sections of the draft: Don Aitkin (who also let us read and quote from his unpublished autobiography), Sir Walter Crocker (who also allowed us generous access to his personal papers), H.M. Foster, Anne Gollan, Robin Gollan, W.S. Hamilton, Peter Karmel, Michael McKernan, A.W. Martin, Beryl Rawson, F.B. Smith, Peter Spearritt, Mary Varghese and Stephen Yorke.

Others have provided information or have commented on specific sections of the text: the late A.J. Birch, Sir Allen Brown, D.J. Brown, Linda Butler, Ken Campbell, L.T. Carron, J.H. Carver, Janet Copland, R.R.C. de Crespigny, Suzanne Edgar, O.J. Eggen, F.J. Fenner, Eileen Haley, Phyllis Hohnen, Thelma Hunter, Christine James, D.A. Low, Iain McCalman, Roy MacLeod, S.F. Mason, Jeremy Mould, Ann Moyal, D.J. Mulvaney, David New, Sir Mark Oliphant, T.R. Ophel, T.M. Owen (who provided extensive information relating to the Canberra University College), Stephen
Padgham, Sir Nicholas Parkinson, Patrick Pentony, Robert Porter, Ian D. Rae, R.W. Rickards, A.W. Rodgers, John Sandeman, Geoffrey Sawyer, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, S.W. Serjeantson, D.W. Smith, Robert Street, E.M. Todd, P.M. White, John F. Williams and M. Wilmot Wright. We also thank those who agreed to be interviewed for the University's Oral History Project, whose names appear on page 479.

Most of all we thank Valsa and Peter for their encouragement and forbearance.