Diane Barwick May 1984.
Photograph supplied by Richard Barwick.
We dedicate this volume of *Aboriginal History* to the memory of Diane Barwick. She was one of the journal’s founders and its first editor. But Aboriginal history in its wider sense was also pioneered by Diane. In Australia she was one of the first to explore the anthropological perspectives in historical documents, or interpret her anthropological data from an historical viewpoint, at a time when disciplinary boundaries kept the two perspectives apart. When the Australian Historical Association first included Aboriginal history in the program for its annual conference (that of 1982), it was to Diane that the convenors of the symposium looked to present the concluding ‘overview’. In the early 1980s she inspired many of us to follow her lead in exploring cross-disciplinary research. As a scholar of great distinction she encouraged us not only by example, but also by her readiness to share her deep knowledge, to advise and to assist.

*Aboriginal History* the journal owes so much of its continuing existence to Diane’s initiative, energy and enthusiasm as editor during its foundation years. Since her death those of us who inherited the task of editing the journal, in attempting to maintain the standards she set have realised just how high those standards were. Diane was not only a superb researcher and writer; she was also an imaginative, meticulous, and above all a dedicated editor. *Aboriginal History* must be regarded as one of the most important achievements of her all too brief life.

At the time of the journal’s inception in 1977 there existed growing concern among Aborigines and non-Aborigines to discover and record neglected facets of Australia’s history since 1788 — an awareness of the need for research on the fate of the first inhabitants in this period. Before the 1960s Australian history had been written almost entirely from the point of view of the newcomers, with little reference to the experiences of the Aborigines. There were some important studies of the impact of settlement on Aboriginal communities, but these remained isolated examples. In the 1970s they were supplemented by the first detailed analysis on an Australia-wide basis presented to a growing readership by the late Charles Rowley in his three-volume history of contact between Aborigines and settlers. These were the first in an important series of publications from the ANU Press. But there was as yet no journal devoted to this kind of history to present ongoing research as its results emerged. The need was pressing and Diane and her associates, particularly Niel Gunson, set out to establish the kind of journal which would meet it. Thus *Aboriginal History* was founded.

Diane’s death brought to us all a sense of deep and abiding loss, the loss of personal friendship and the loss of intellectual leadership. It is still hard to accept, still keenly felt. At the time there were many tributes: on radio, in the press and in professional journals. One of the first of these, on radio, came from Bob Reece, who with Diane edited the first volume of *Aboriginal History*.

'The sudden and tragic death of anthropologist Diane McEachern Barwick on 4 April brought to an end a vigorous academic and public career devoted to securing justice for Australia's indigenous peoples, the Australian Aborigines. Dr Barwick possessed that combination — so rare in Australia today — of absolutely scrupulous scholarship and passionate conviction, and her reputation and influence have reached far beyond her actual published work. A Canadian by birth and a graduate in anthropology from the University of British Columbia, her first job was at the Victoria Museum in Vancouver where she worked on the Indian tribes of the north-west Pacific coast.

'When Diane arrived in Canberra from Canada in 1960 to do her research on the Aborigines of Victoria, the policy of assimilation was under attack from Aboriginal and other quarters. She discovered amongst the part-Aboriginal people of Coranderrk, Lake Tyers and the other old Victorian reserves far more of the traditional culture patterns than anyone had expected to survive.

'In the historical dimension of her work Diane Barwick was also able to reveal the extraordinary way in which white Australian society had conspired to perpetuate the much-loved idea that Aborigines were essentially feckless, that they could never adjust to the new economic conditions created by the invaders. If the people of Coranderrk had been allowed to have their way, if their land had not been given by a fickle colonial government to neighbouring farmers, the pattern of Aboriginal history in Victoria might have been different.

'As it was, a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy continued unchallenged until the emergence of a new generation of Aboriginal activists in the 1960s. It is almost as if the collective psyche of white Australia needed Aboriginal failure to reinforce its own sense of achievement in transplanting European society into a sometimes difficult environment. Given her concern for justice, it is not surprising that Diane Barwick was a driving force in the campaign to have ownership of the Framlingham and Lake Tyers reserves vested in the people who regarded those places as their homes. A notable victory during [the period of] the Fraser government was the transfer of Framlingham in the Western District: an achievement which was largely due to her exhaustive historical research and skilful advocacy.

'My own acquaintance with Diane came about through our involvement in the journal Aboriginal History, which we helped to establish in 1977 and which she edited from 1978 until 1982. Most academic journals depend upon the devotion and hard work of a small band of workers, and this was no exception. Over the years Diane lavished an enormous amount of time on editing articles, corresponding with contributors, correcting galley proofs, and so on. She was a most exacting critic and never pulled any punches when she saw sloppiness of any kind. Her sometimes brutal honesty could bruise people, but they usually came to recognise that the intent was constructive and truth-seeking. She was not an academic point-scorer.

'As well as possessing such critical and analytical skills, Diane was an extraordinary repository of knowledge about the Victorian Aborigines in particular, about government policy and about the people who were involved with Aborigines in different ways: protectors, missionaries, crown lands commissioners, police, amateur ethnographers and so on. Only a tiny portion of this knowledge ever found its way into print and her death has meant, among other things, the loss of a unique resource. Her published work, extensive as it is, is only the tip of the iceberg. One consolation is that she was always more than generous with knowledge towards colleagues and students whom she considered worthy of using it and consequently she has had a significant influence on two generations of anthropologists and
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As an anthropologist, Diane Barwick reminded us that people of less than the full Aboriginal descent are Aborigines too. As an historian, she rescued from anonymity the people who had paid the highest price for the establishment of a new European society in the southern hemisphere.

The tributes given at the moving memorial gathering of her friends and colleagues held at University House on 17 April 1986 captured the range of Diane's personal and academic qualities. The speakers that afternoon included Ken Inglis, Nancy Williams, Diane Bell and Colin Tatz. With the consent of those concerned we present here some excerpts from the tributes made at the time, for they focused on just those qualities of Diane which we all hold so dear.

Ken Inglis had known Diane in the early days of her doctoral research on Victorian Aborigines:

'I first met Diane about twenty-five years ago, in Adelaide. She had just begun the research for her PhD thesis about regional affiliation and group identity among Aboriginal migrants in Melbourne. Diane McEachern, aged twenty-two, was studying part-Aboriginal people, as the phrase then was, in Victoria. Judy Inglis, a few years older, was studying part-Aboriginal people in South Australia. Not many scholars anywhere were studying part-Aborigines in 1960; and Diane and Judy taught each other a lot about an enterprise that was both anthropological and historical and couldn't help being political.

In Marie Reay's 1964 symposium, *Aborigines now*, Diane gave a historical sketch of the three thousand or so people of Aboriginal ancestry living in Victoria. The book contained also an essay on the dispersal of Aboriginal families in South Australia from 1860 to 1960, drafted by Judy Inglis and completed after her death by Diane. She had also gone through Judy's papers with love and tact and skill and given me the advice I needed on what to do with them.

'As a scholar Diane learned to cross with ease the border between the territories marked out for anthropology and history. In the short run, that perhaps didn't help her academic reputation, in a world where most anthropologists don't read history and most historians don't read anthropology.

In 1977 she was a member of the group who founded the journal *Aboriginal History*, and she edited six volumes of the journal in the next six years. When she resigned to get on with other work the Chairman of the Editorial Board wrote to her saying: "You have been largely responsible for putting us in the right direction and setting high scholarly standards, and your wider contacts in the world of Aboriginal affairs and anthropology have greatly enriched our experience..." She stayed on the board, and wrote for later editors a document rich in wisdom and wit. I quote: "Because the journal has an important service function in acquainting laymen with linguistic, archaeological and anthropological evidence as well as oral and written historical records, the editors have a special responsibility to ensure a broad coverage of the field, and to assist authors to make their ideas and jargon intelligible to non-specialists."

2 Barwick 1964b.
3 Inglis 1964.
‘Niel Gunson, her colleague and comrade from the beginning of the journal, wrote at the
time of her death: “Her wise counsel, her knowledge and contacts, her dedication, and above
all, the distinctive impress of her personality, will be sorely missed, though in our hearts we
know that she has lit a lamp for us to follow. Her memorial must be our renewed dedication.”

In 1979 the journal published a remarkable scholarly aid edited by Diane with Michael
Mace and Tom Stannage, the Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander History. “We agreed,”
the editors wrote, “that there was an urgent need for a manual providing information for
Aborigines beginning research on their own history.” So they found about thirty collabor­
ators and got the manuscripts from them in three weeks. Three weeks! Isabel McBryde tells
me that the vision for this Handbook was above all Diane’s; hers was the driving force. It is
full of fundamental information, conveyed with a sure sense of what the beginning scholar
needs to know, and marvellously clear. It has been reprinted several times and is much used
by undergraduates. Like all Diane’s work, the Handbook exhibits both theoretical insight
and meticulous detail. Whoever attempts a thorough account of Diane’s life and work will
need to consider how she described herself in the list of contributors to the Handbook.
Everybody else gives an academic or tribal title or address. Diane Barwick is merely “45 Waite
Street, Farrar, A.C.T. 2607”.

‘At 45 Waite Street, Farrar, and at desks temporarily occupied here and there in the
ANU, she gave what time she could spare to completing her book on Victorian Aborigines.
Rebellion at Coranderrk was long delayed by two commitments: a commitment to other
people’s lives and a commitment to perfection. The book will now be, among other things,
a memorial. The reader’s report to the publisher says this: “The painstaking research, the
perceptive judgments of people and events, and the brilliant prose ... combine to produce a
magnificent account ....” The publisher, this assessor goes on, “may have a classic on its
hands; certainly it has a landmark manuscript, one which occupies a place in Australian
literature and historical writing akin to the great transitional paintings in the history of art
movements”.

‘When Diane resigned from editing Aboriginal History the biggest job on her desk was to
write one of five volumes in an Oxford history of Australia; her volume was to encompass
Aboriginal life from forty thousand years ago to the present. While planning for that she
gave generous help to another multi-volumed project, for a bicentennial history of Australia.
She convened a symposium on that project at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies;
she helped organise a conference on Aboriginal participation in the series; and she remained
an indispensable adviser on matters large and small. The quantity, quality and texture of
what those books deliver about Aboriginal life will owe much to her counsel.

‘On the morning of her death Diane told her husband Richard that she could now see
how the Oxford book had to be constructed. She had found a model in Canadian writing
which clarified her long thinking about how to tell the Australian story. Diane’s unwritten
general history is a profound loss to scholarship. But as Niel Gunson says of the journal,
she has lit a lamp for others to follow. Younger scholars she has inspired and educated,
Lyndall Ryan, Ann Curthoys and others, know as they grieve that her work will live on in
theirs. Lyndall Ryan in a note to a colleague speaks of her as “brave, rigorous, warm and
supportive”. In some sense the support goes on. Whoever takes over that unwritten book
will get immense help from Diane.

‘Those other scholars will also get much help from Richard. He is now embarking on a job
of sorting and finishing and depositing of the kind Diane did for others. He is using a memo
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Diane prepared for Irene Rowley, based in turn on one she prepared for Patricia Stanner. Richard too has been a maker of *Aboriginal History*. His designs for the cover of every issue, his and Diane's joint note, 'A memorial for Thomas Bungaleen', his piece on the likely identification of an aeroplane on an engraved Warlpiri pearlshell which is the basis of his superb cover for the 1982 issue — these glimpses of a shared work help the rest of us to celebrate their partnership.

Nancy Williams, a colleague from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, concentrated her tribute to Diane on her work with the Institute, and the values and commitment that shaped it:  

'Diane was a passionate woman, and a woman of great compassion. To celebrate Diane as a friend and as a person is to understand her — at least in large measure — as a scholar. Her achievements as a scholar aptly memorialise her because they grew out of the values and commitments to people that were basic to her personality: a passionate commitment to fairness, honesty, openness, and equality.

'Diane called her values those of the 1950s: work is a good thing, commitment to finish a job started is not to be compromised. To want to accomplish significant things is good, and to receive recognition for achievement is just. Along with that went a fierce dislike of dishonesty, misrepresentation, and carelessness. For her, ends never justified means; and she was willing to bear the criticism of ideologues when defence of truth demanded.

'It was perhaps because Diane was "a product of the fifties" as she defined it that she achieved so much despite not having the security of a tenured position, something she should have had on the basis of her excellence in teaching as well as her scholarship. Nevertheless, she gained the recognition of scholars whose opinions she held in high regard. That was the reward she valued most of all, and was a tribute to her own energy and dedication. She knew the value of her work and she persevered. She was strong in her convictions and true to herself.

'Diane was a foundation member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, and the first woman elected to the Council of the Institute. She had served the Institute longer, in more varied and influential roles, than any other member, and during most of her twenty five years of service to the Institute she held no renumerated position. She cared deeply about the Institute, and her involvement in its life was both a reflection of her commitment to the purpose for which it was established and of her perception of the changing society in which it functioned.

'In 1981 she urged the development of research and training programs which try to meet the needs and wishes of the Aboriginal communities, particularly those in southern Australia, which have been relatively neglected by the Institute. "In my view," she said, "training [Aborigines as researchers] and expansion of Institute information services ought to be a priority for the future."

'The late Professor Stanner's voluminous papers are housed in the Institute; Diane went through all of them, organised them and catalogued them. As always, she worked with the dual aim of enabling appreciation of a scholar's achievement and of giving all who might be interested efficient access to their work.

'At the time she died she was nearing completion of the first and major phase of an Abo-

4 Dr Williams's commemorative address was also published in *Canberra Anthropology* 9(1), 1986:1-3.
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original biographical index — a project of which she was the chief architect. This index will be a tangible memorial to her personal values realised through disciplined scholarship. It is already in existence in the Library of the Institute: twenty-two file-drawers containing some twelve thousand cards with entries including the names of Aboriginal individuals, biographical information about them and the sources of the information. It is a practical guide for Aboriginal people in search of their family history. And it will grow on the foundation she so carefully and caringly built.

‘Diane was what she did. Nothing except her love for Richard, her husband, and Laura, her daughter, was more important than her work. Nothing could please her more than a friend or colleague telling her that they had read something she had written, had understood her argument, and as a result had learned something important or seen something in a new light. And if the appreciation of her scholarship went along with an accolade for her writing style, the lucid way she had presented her argument, then she was exhilarated.

‘She was an absolute equalitarian: perhaps that was why she became part of a network of sisterhood that was for her an essential aspect of feminism (although she rarely used that term) — for her the sisterhood was always translated into support for particular women in particular situations who had not received recognition or advancement, or had been subjected to unfair treatment simply because they were women. And sometimes there was a triumph to share. Diane extended the same generous help to all who approached her: workmates, unknown and struggling junior scholars to the most respected and distinguished. Diane would sit down and write pages of criticism, always mixed with gentle encouragement. She saw the worth and value in every person’s work.

‘Diane had a very special gift of perceiving when a friend — or even a relatively new acquaintance — was in some kind of distress, and of responding empathetically and generously, whether with her time or some material effort. Few of us here have not been rescued from some pain by Diane’s acts: a sympathetic conversation, an understanding letter, an expression of support, or of indignation at an injustice.

‘Since her death I have been reminded, as have many others, of Diane’s sense of humour, her sharp wit, her infectious and hearty laugh.

‘Diane inspired us, and she has left us much. We will not forget.’

Diane Bell, a close friend as well as anthropological colleague, spoke at the memorial service of the significance of Diane’s anthropological research:

‘... I would like to quote from Diane: “Although the concept of equity has not figured in the development of anthropological theory, it is an implicit concern of a major area of anthropological research.”5 There followed the most exacting documentation of the Framlingham people’s case: it was, the editor wrote, a “tale of the remorseless denial of justice to them [that] wrenches the readers’ conscience . . . [and] clearly demonstrates that academic enquiry need not be soulless.”6

‘However, Diane did not rest there, she provided a context within which we could read the case-study. Drawing on the North American and New Zealand experience, she set out the claims of Fourth World peoples on the nation state and explored the modes of dispute settlement available to them. It is only recently that it has become fashionable for anthropologists

to debate this complex of issues: Diane provided her analysis in 1979 and had lectured on the material at ANU in the previous year.

'This ability to locate her work within a comparative framework was evident in Diane's work on the Treaty for a just settlement between Aborigines and white Australians. In her article "Making a treaty" she contrasted overseas experience of treaties with that of Australia and wrote: "The Aboriginal Treaty Committee has reminded other Australians that the Queen's representatives have never invited the Aborigines to negotiate their future." Diane's work did much to create the conditions under which such negotiations might occur. That she wrote anthropology which mattered is evident in the heavy reliance placed on her work by scholars such as Professor Charles Rowley. In his *Outcasts in white Australia* her 1964 doctoral thesis, "A little more than kin: regional affinity and group identity among Aboriginal migrants in Melbourne", is the most heavily referenced work of the volume.

'Not surprisingly, Diane's carefully crafted essays have become enduring classics: for example, "Economic absorption without assimilation: the case of some Melbourne part-Aboriginal families" of 1962 and "And the lubras are ladies now" of 1970. And I am sure that her 1984 paper in *Aboriginal History*, "Mapping the Past", of which we only have Part I, will become the basis for future research and provide a model for all those who attempt to reconcile disparate sources. Working with the amateur ethnography of nineteenth-century pastoralists, parsons and public servants and modern anthropological accounts of territorial and linguistic boundaries elsewhere in Australia, Diane produced an innovative, meticulous and balanced account of Victorian clans in the period from 1835 to 1904.

'Diane recognised all too clearly that the anthropological preoccupation with traditional society shaped both public and professional understandings and sympathies. In reviewing the reviewers of Phillip Pepper's book *You are what you make yourself to be*, she commented:

Except for a few students sent to study acculturation in the 1950s and 1960s, anthropologists virtually ignored the southern communities which had stubbornly preserved their identity despite the abandonment of [their traditional] rituals.

When anthropological writing did filter into school textbook definitions of Aboriginal culture, these antiquarian preoccupations seemed to confirm popular belief that Aborigines who had lost their ceremonies had lost their culture.

'Anthropologists, she contended, should pay more attention to the impact of missionaries, administrators, police, pastoralists and politicians on traditional life as well as to the lives of Aboriginal evangelists and reformers.

'Meeting Professor Bill Stanner's challenge that we needed to know more of the lives of influential individuals and the folk history of communities to reach an adequate appreciation of policy implementation, Diane introduced us to the world of Louisa Strugnell Briggs — and wisely reminds us that the battles of "This most resolute lady" were "not less heroic because they were domestic" and cautions us regarding the trend of revisionist histories to overlook the process of accommodation.

'It is in writing of her friends that the interplay of Diane's scholarship and personal

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7 Barwick 1980.
8 Pepper 1980.
9 Barwick 1981b:82.
10 Barwick 1985b:221.
warmth is most evident. In her celebration of the life of Aunty Ellen, the pastor’s wife, in *Fighters and singers*, Diane confessed:

I did not plan, all those years ago, to write her life story. I do so now as a tribute to a woman who deeply influenced my life. What she taught me about the responsibilities of daughters, wives and mothers re-inforced — and made me appreciate — the example of loving instruction given by the women of my own family. What she told me of the past has shaped my work for over 20 years. All that I have written has something of Aunty Ellen in it.11

I had the good fortune to meet Diane in 1974 and I am well aware that since then there has been something of her in all I do also. I know I am not alone in this.'

11 Barwick 1985a:175.

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_____ ‘“And the lubras are ladies now”’, in Fay Gale ed., *Woman’s role in Aboriginal society*, pp.31-8. Canberra, 1970.


