A source of new energy and new ideas  
(1975-1981)

Abstract for chapter 3

This chapter details the challenges faced by the developing HRC. Ian Donaldson was re-appointed Director and the Centre began full operations, though at a time when funding cuts would constrain it ‘to no more than an absolute minimum size.’ However, Donaldson was convinced that such constraints made centres like the HRC more important than ever to ensure mobility in academic life.

An important series of interdisciplinary conferences brought together sociologists, historians, anthropologists, cartographers, film-makers and geographers as well as philosophers, linguistic, art and literary scholars. The International Association of University Professors of English hailed the HRC as ‘the main beacon for visitors to Australia.’

Donaldson at last acquired in 1981 a long-sought Deputy, Professor Graeme Clarke, who would provide great administrative and personal support and make major contributions to HRC programmes.

Keywords
academics, annual themes, conferences, funding research
The HRC could certainly be said to have established its own identity by mid-1975. It had already received the most convincing accolade of international recognition. Richard Johnson had visited the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s to find inspiration and models for the HRC in the varied and proliferating research centres there. But Donaldson found on visiting the USA himself after 1975 that it was the HRC which was now providing inspiration and a model: 'it had attracted the attention of a group of American academics who hoped to establish a similar national humanities centre in the United States; one of whom . . . came as a Visiting Fellow to Canberra to observe at close quarters how the HRC worked'.¹ The Harvard luminaries who consulted Donaldson did not as yet know for certain where their proposed National Humanities Center would be located, how it would be funded, or who its Director would be. They were however very interested to know where the money for the HRC had come from, how it had got started in the first place and how it operated as a national centre. Characteristically, the Americans moved fast. The National Humanities Center was established at the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina in 1976 and opened for business in the autumn of 1978. Nearly 300 humanities research institutes of one kind or another would be operating throughout the United States by the late 1980s. One of the National Humanities Center’s Founding Fathers was the Harvard medievalist Professor Morton W. Bloomfield, who was an HRC Visiting Fellow in 1978 and wrote to Ralph Elliott on his return from what he referred to as ‘that locus amoenus redolent of
the Golden Age: The Humanities Research Centre of ANU... Elliott himself attended the National Humanities Center as a Visiting Fellow in May 1981, after his second term on the Advisory and Steering Committees of the HRC. There was no question by then that the HRC was recognised nationally and internationally. What would continue to prove a seemingly intractable problem was how to establish its identity within the structure of The Australian National University itself. It was a question to which several plausible answers have been proposed, and are indeed still being proposed at the time of writing. It was also one which would inevitably be bedevilled by the spectre of the HRC’s identity being sacrificed on the altar of administrative convenience.

A Joint Committee had been set up to examine the status within the University of unaffiliated centres and units, such as the HRC. It concluded in May 1975 that such bodies suffered collectively from a ‘lack of identification with the main sections of the University’, and recommended accordingly that all centres and units be affiliated with a Research School or a Faculty. Horan was not too impressed: he wrote to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor that the main proposals of the Report of the Joint Committee, ‘and the premises from which they stem, seem to me to take little account of realities within the University’. One of the main problems, as he saw it, was the Committee’s
assumption that a number of disparate bodies will have significant common characteristics because they are described as “centres” or “units” . . . I am not convinced that a board or group comprising the units assigned either as IAS [Institute of Advanced Studies]-type or Faculty-type would be capable of mustering the community of interest, the mutual understanding of subject matter or, at least, methodology, which would enable it to engage in worth-while discussion and scrutiny of the affairs of its component parts. And to take what is perhaps an extreme, but a possible example, could the concerns of the Humanities Research Centre be adequately appreciated and represented on the Board of the Faculties by the heads of the Centre for Continuing Education, ORAM [Office of Research on Academic Methods], and Federal Financial Relations?

The impact of the proposals could in fact be counterproductive: they would ‘lead, through the abolition or depreciation of Advisory Committees, to a reduction in the opportunities the Centres enjoy for contact with other parts of the University’.4

Donaldson’s style was ever to pursue the normally more rewarding road of conciliation and compromise rather than confrontation: he was, as Graeme Clarke put it admiringly, ‘adroit’ in dealing with the ‘Byzantine machinations of university bureaucracy’; and Clarke as a great classical scholar knew a Byzantine machination when he saw one. Thus Donaldson was ready to agree that ‘a genuine problem exists concerning Centres and Units’; and he accepted that, ‘for example, proposals for new appointments in Centres and Units need to be scrutinized as vigorously as they would be in other parts of the University’, and that ‘where a sense of isolation is really felt to exist, steps should be taken to create appropriate links with other University bodies’. However, he insisted, ‘I don’t believe that the problem of isolation exists for the HRC’. He then listed in support of this position the formal and informal links already existing between the HRC and other parts of the University: the Director was a member of the Boards of the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) and the School of General Studies (SGS); the HRC’s Steering Committee included members from various other parts of ANU; Visiting Fellows usually had close ties with Departments both in the IAS and SGS; the Centre tried actively to keep in touch with other parts of the University through its Bulletin, its lecture series and its seminars and conferences;
and Donaldson himself still taught in the Department of English. Isolation was hardly the problem in these circumstances. The problem was likely rather to be one of over commitment through excessive involvement. Moreover, the HRC’s position was rather different from that of the other Centres and Units, in that it was not supposed to be identified solely or even specifically with ANU: the Australian Universities Council had made clear in its Report of May 1972 that ‘the operations of the Centre should be of a kind to benefit directly teaching and research in the humanities throughout the country.’ The net result of the Joint Committee’s proposals could accordingly be to weaken important existing links within and outside of the University; to place the HRC with a group of Centres and Units towards which it feels great goodwill, but which have little in common with it; to create, consequently, the very “isolation” which the Committee alleges it is trying to remove; and to add very considerably to the time already taken up by administrative procedures within the University.5

Administrative procedures within the University would ever be the subject of every senior academic’s lament. But this was not the only intractable and vexatious problem besetting the HRC. It had always been recognised that the Director and whoever his alter ego might be had to be academics of the highest distinction. It was also becoming irresistibly evident that Donaldson’s inspiring and congenial personal qualities were critical to the continuing success of the HRC. But academics of high distinction need periodical sabbaticals for serious research (as the HRC was providing for its Fellows); and academics of high distinction with inspiring and congenial personalities are always going to be in great demand from other institutions as academic visitors. It was therefore inevitable that people like Donaldson would be absent from their posts from time to time. But Visiting Fellows who were attracted to a Centre in the first instance largely because of the reputation of its Director would be justified in feeling disgruntled if the Director were not around when they came. The only answer was that the Director would have to have a Deputy who would possess as far as possible similar qualities to attract visitors and make them feel welcome. But the HRC did not yet possess a Deputy of any kind. It did not even yet possess a permanent Director.

Donaldson took a brief term of absence from 26 August to 25 September 1975, to deliver a paper at the English Institute at Harvard and visit
research centres in the USA, leaving Horan to fence with the bureaucrats and regale the visitors. Donaldson summarised the results of his observations a month after his return in a paper entitled ‘The future of the Humanities Research Centre: a personal view.’ The aspect that he considered of greatest importance to the future of the Centre was naturally its philosophical structure, of which he judged there had originally been ‘no firm or close definition . . . The Centre’s committee agreed . . . that the Centre’s general concern was to be with “European thought and culture and their influence overseas”’. He had decided to take ‘a broad construction, interpreting the second “and” to mean in effect “and/or” . . . I should want to stick by that interpretation.’ It might seem that what he really had in mind was a construction so broad as to allow for a virtual reversal of the original mandate. He averred that he did ‘not think that the Centre should be less ready to sponsor work on aspects of European thought and culture which have not at any stage substantially affected the consciousness of ex- or non-European people’; and he would say that normally ‘the study of indigenous non-European cultures is not the H.R.C.’s business.’ For example, he did not ‘think that we should sponsor an
ethnomusicologist who wants to come here to study Aboriginal music, or an anthropologist whose work has been with African peoples. Both might seem thirty years later just what the HRC’s offshoot, the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, might very much wish to sponsor. In fact the HRC would over the years sponsor continuing and very substantial work in the area of the study of Indigenous Australian issues. Donaldson in any case emphasised that he ‘should not wish to ignore the influence of the New World on the Old . . . “The impact on Europe of the discovery of Australia” would seem to me a proper topic for the H.R.C. one year to explore.’

As for the physical future of the HRC, Donaldson affirmed the view of the Universities Commission, that the HRC was to be ‘thought of as a national centre, stimulating and advancing research in the humanities throughout Australia.’ It should accordingly grow, if not into a Research School, with its departmental structure and large numbers of tenured academic appointments, at least into a Research Centre on a truly national – indeed, international – scale, with a programme of Visiting Fellowships which might compare with those of some of the larger American research centres, and serving ‘a genuine national need.’ He had originally felt that ‘we should choose as Visiting Fellows those whose research projects were in some way close to other sorts of work already going on within the H.R.C.; that we should be cautious of bringing to the H.R.C. people from the fields of (for example) Music or Fine Arts, as they find no-one to talk to, and limited library resources.’ However, he now felt that ‘the Centre should try to attract, inter alia, a good many visitors who are doing work that is not being done at the A.N.U., or perhaps even elsewhere in Australia . . . The Centre would thus take something of a provocative, rather than merely a supportive role in relation to existing studies in the humanities:’ it should ‘act as something of a catalyst.’

Donaldson’s choice of the term ‘provocative’ is at least intriguing: the superfluous and imprecise term ‘proactive’ had not yet made it into the dictionaries, so one may presume that Donaldson was using ‘provocative’ in the sense of ‘tending to rouse, incite, tempt or allure’, rather than in its other dictionary definition of ‘intentionally irritating’. His intention was no doubt to affirm that the mission of the Centre could be to challenge, as well as to complement academic activities elsewhere in ANU. For the rest, he had effectively given up on the original conception of the HRC as

a library-centre, with a substantial collection of books of its own. The Warburg Centre was often mentioned as a
model for the H.R.C. I should like nothing better than to see the Centre develop in this way, but feel that such a development is unlikely to occur without very large and (at present) unlooked-for benefactions.

However, he understood that ‘the University Librarian has accepted my suggestion that eventually the H.R.C. ought to move from its present home in the A.D. Hope building to a special area within the proposed new University Library building, with immediate access to the humanities collection’. There were indeed plans for a large Humanities and Social Sciences Library adjacent to the Student Services Building on a still vacant area on the site of the Chancelry, to be named in honour of Sir Keith Hancock, former Professor of History in RSSS. It failed alas to get approval from the Universities Commission and was never built. Hancock’s name was eventually assigned to the new Science Library, a most handsome and congenial building, but not actually one serving the discipline for which Hancock was noted.

In the meantime, the HRC Advisory Council was happy to agree at once to Donaldson’s proposal that the Centre should take a special interest in the fields of Music and the Fine Arts, and that the Centre might accordingly commit up to 25 per cent of its funds for Visiting Fellowships in these areas during the current period. The emphasis on Music, Art and the Arts generally was to be a very productive direction for the HRC in subsequent years, leading to exhibitions at the University and joint research projects and exhibitions with national cultural institutions. In fact it was foreshadowed in one of the first HRC conferences held in 1975 when Donaldson, along with Dr A.G. Serle from Monash and ANU’s Professor Manning Clark, organised a conference on cultural developments in Australia in the 1890s which was attended by 60 people.

Complementing the large numbers of Fellows in Classics, History, Philosophy and other humanities disciplines in the years 1974-1981 (106 Fellows, 25 Conference Visitors and 12 short-term Fellows), the research subjects of those visitors reveal a strong focus on Literature, Music and the Arts. For example, Professor Leon Edel from the University of Hawaii came to work on Henry James, Professor J.V. Bony from the Department of Art at the University of California, Berkeley on Gothic architecture, Professor D.H. Green from Cambridge on Medieval German and Comparative Literature, Professor J.M Holquist from Yale on nineteenth century Russian novelists, Dr Rüdiger Joppien of the Department of Fine Arts,
University of Cologne came to do research on drawings and paintings from eighteenth and nineteenth century maritime voyages to Australia, Professor Manji Kobayashi from Kobe University to work on modern Australian poetry and its translations into Japanese, Professor Chung Chong-Wa from Korea University on D.H Lawrence, Professor André Lefevere from the University of Antwerp on literary translation, Professor L.L. Albertsen from the University of Aarhus, Denmark on German poetry since Schiller, Professor C.K. Abraham from the University of California on seventeenth century satirists, Professor L.A Dittmer of the Department of Music at the University of Ottawa on motets of Adam de la Halle, Australian musicologist Dr John Meyer on the history of the piano concerto, Professor Victor Lange from Princeton on German literature, Professor J.R. Lawler of the University of Chicago on Baudelaire, Professor M. Dufrenne from Paris-Nanterre on aesthetics, Professor Saul Novack from the Department of Music at Queen’s College, City University of New York on chromaticism in triadic tonality. Helen Topliss from Monash worked on her catalogue raisonné of Australian artist Tom Roberts, Professor B. F Dukore from the University of Hawaii on Ibsen, Shaw and Brecht, Professor Marilyn Rose from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Binghamton on literary translation, and Professor Leo Treitler from the Department of Music of the SUNY at Stony Brook on musical literacy in the Middle Ages. Australian poet Dorothy Green from ANU was at the Centre too as were English art educator Neville Weston, South Australian art historian Robert Smith, graphic artist Jorg Schmeisser from Hamburg (later to work in Australia); and Australian-born but English-domiciled poet Peter Porter and English artist David Blackburn were short term visitors along with English theatre administrator Elizabeth Sweeting, who came at the HRC’s invitation to advise on the proposed new Arts centre. This is but a sample of the cultural research interests of the Fellows in the first seven years and in future years there would be many more Fellows in the Arts. Their impact on ANU and on the other Australian universities, where most Fellows from overseas also went to lecture as standard practice from the mid-seventies in line with the HRC’s aim to be a truly national centre, could only have been considerable.

In 1977, Patrick McCaughey, then Professor at Monash and later to be Director of the National Gallery of Victoria and the Yale Center for British Art, convened a conference on Poetry and Painting, at which a number of well-known Australian painters and poets discussed their work. Sasha Grishin, later to be Professor of Art History at ANU, then
a young Fine Arts and Russian graduate, took up a twelve-month Visiting Fellowship at the HRC early in 1977 to work on Byzantine Art. He declared later that

Ian Donaldson’s HRC was one of the most imaginative and dynamic weapons available to academics and intellectuals to enable the Humanities to have a voice in Australian cultural life. Without the assistance of the HRC, I would never have been able to get the Fine Art Programme off the ground at the ANU in 1967, and this directly led to the creation of the Department of Art History about a decade later.7

It was the first of the new departures in cultural studies which owed their origin at ANU to Donaldson’s vision and support.

Unsurprisingly, the University now decided to invite Donaldson to accept appointment as Director for a period to be ‘determined by the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with you. A period of 5 years in the first instance has been suggested with the possibility of

---

re-appointment’.\textsuperscript{8} It was the only possible response to the flood of unrestrainedly laudatory testimonials that was continuing to pour in praising the qualities of both Donaldson and Horan. Academics understand the meaning of words, whatever else they may or may not understand; and academics of such distinction would not use words expressive of such enthusiasm if they had not meant them to be taken seriously. Professor J.E. Morpurgo, Professor of American Literature at the University of Leeds and a former Chief Editor of Penguin Books, who lectured on radio and television during his visit, for example, reported that:

Through the generosity of the HRC I have achieved far more than I could have hoped for . . . the only sour note that I must admit to in this report is not so much a criticism of the HRC as a comment on my own folly in not appreciating, in advance and in full, the vast opportunity that was being offered to me . . . my work and my comfort during these last months, as indeed my happy view of Australia, has been consistently supported by Mr Horan and by the wisdom, energy and unflagging enthusiasm of Professor Donaldson.

It had been ‘one of the most useful and stimulating experiences of my life.’ English composer Christopher J. Lyndon-Gee, from the Department of Music at Ellesmere College (who lectured on the ABC during his stay and in Sydney and Adelaide on contemporary music), was certain that the A.N.U. has long been aware that it has in Professor Donaldson an academic, an intellect, an administrator and a personality in every respect of rare qualities, and that the H.R.C. has in him as its first Director a person of exceptional vision . . . None of the projects I undertook while in Canberra would have been possible without his selfless co-operation, constant advice, tact and diplomacy . . . well beyond the call of duty . . . My impression is that the Humanities Research Centre . . . is exemplary of its kind.

And Professor C.L. Price from Swansea who came to work on eighteenth century drama found ‘conditions at the HRC ideal for work of this kind . . . I have met with friendliness and kindness everywhere.’ Not bad for an establishment of one academic, a research secretary,
a departmental secretary and a relief stenographer. Professor Price was another example of the widespread influence of the HRC: during his stay of six months he lectured in the English Department at ANU and at New England, Newcastle, Adelaide, Flinders and Monash Universities.

What was of course quite obvious was that this establishment had to be increased if the Centre were to have any prospect of living up to the reputation which it had acquired so early. And the first addition to the establishment had to be a full-time academic Deputy for Donaldson. The position was awarded in June 1976 to Grahame Johnston, a New Zealander, Professor of English at the University of New South Wales’ Faculty of Military Studies based at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, with special interests in bibliography, lexicography and medieval, Celtic and English and American literature. Johnston had been a brilliant teacher at ANU in the sixties and Robert Wallace Professor of English at Melbourne and later concentrated his researches in the areas of bibliography and linguistics, including an Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Australian English. However, no separate budgetary provision was made for the post, which meant that the Centre would be receiving a substantial relief in terms of workload at the cost of a substantially greater burden in financial terms: it would be able to afford to do less at a time when it would be physically able to do more. It must nonetheless have seemed to Donaldson and his excessively overworked colleagues to be the greatest relief that they could have looked for. It was to prove their most tragic disappointment.

Meanwhile the agonising reappraisal continued over how the HRC should be situated within the overarching structure of the University, despite Donaldson’s reassurances that isolation was not really a problem in the case of the Centre at least. The problem was one that had never been anticipated at the time when the proposal for the HRC had been accepted by the University. It had then seemed reasonable to assume that the resources available to ANU would continue to increase by around five per cent annually. Now it appeared that they were more likely to decrease by at least that proportion. The Joint Committee on the Centres and Units of the Boards of the Institute of Advanced Studies and the School of General Studies noted that the former had observed in a previous report in 1973 that there was then an ‘increasing tendency for developments which provide facilities important to the academic work of the University, to be established outside the main IAS/SGS structure in various centres and units.’
But ‘the existence of the centres outside the main IADS [sic]/SGS structure is unsatisfactory from the point of view both of the centres and the University as a whole, particularly in the situation of little or no growth now confronting the University.’ Professor Anthony Low, the former Director of RSPacS, had already warned early in 1975, on becoming Vice-Chancellor, that the years of expansion were over, and the University would have to be prepared to make reductions and even deletions in its programmes. He had also insisted that it would
therefore be all the more necessary to take new initiatives, if only to maintain morale; and the Centres would seem the natural dynamos to generate new initiatives. But the Joint Committee observed ominously that centres were ‘using a rapidly increasing share of the University’s overall resources (in 1973 5.7% of total running expenses, in 1974 7% and in 1975 approximately 8%).’ It was necessary for the University to consider seriously whether this trend should be allowed to continue. The Committee indeed believed that ‘without the understanding and support of the main sections of the University, not only the future development, but perhaps even the survival of the centres may be at risk’; and that ‘an essential step in the process of endeavouring to secure that support and understanding is for the activities and plans of the centres to be subject to the same procedures of peer scrutiny and discussion as those of their colleagues in the Institute, the School or the Central Areas.’ [italics in the original]

The question was thus with which of these main sections of the University the HRC should be associated. The Committee recognised that close academic links existed between the HRC and the Faculty of Arts and that these should be continued and extended. It had been at the initiative of members of The Faculties that the HRC had come into being in the first place, as the only way in which the Humanities might acquire some counterpart to the great Research Schools established for the pursuit of other disciplines. But the whole climate of education funding had changed drastically since then, and there was a certain unease to say the least within The Faculties at the fact that HRC was still able to bring in Visiting Fellows while certain Departments were having to reduce lecturing staff. Funding for the Centre would by contrast look very modest in the context of the Research Schools. The Committee accordingly saw ‘benefits in the association of the Centre with the Institute [of Advanced Studies] for the purposes of resource allocation,’ and suggested accordingly that the HRC ‘should explore the possibility of affiliation with the Research School of Social Sciences’.9

Ralph Elliott would later consider the option of affiliation with RSSS as an opportunity lost for the HRC, as holding greater prospect for expansion or at least outreach than affiliation with The Faculties, which might have seemed more appropriate to the origins and tradition of the Centre. Donaldson for his part recognised that the HRC would have to be fitted into the University structure somehow. He told the members of the HRC Advisory Committee, that it should be noted in any case that ‘the proposed affiliation of the HRC with
the RSSS is for resource allocation purposes only . . . The net effect of the HRC being affiliated with the RSSS would thus not mean that we severed in any way our existing links with the School of General Studies.'10 But now the RSSS Faculty Board themselves appeared to discover difficulties in the way of the affiliation of the Centre with their School: it was argued that it would be too difficult to separate the HRC's budget from that of the School, and that the HRC's academic interests were too far removed from those of other Departments of the RSSS for effective peer scrutiny to be possible. This might have seemed rather surprising, since the RSSS at the time included two former Presidents of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, as well as two former Secretaries and a number of Fellows of the Academy. It was hardly likely that they would find the activities of the Centre too arcane for them to fathom. The main problem was rather that the role of the Centre might be seen to overlap or even compete with that of the History of Ideas Unit within the RSSS. Negotiations involving Donaldson and RSSS Professor A.J. Youngson failed to resolve the issue. The Board therefore decided not to pursue the proposal of affiliation with the HRC. However, it was apparently not going to be any easier to affiliate the Centre with any other section of the University: the 14th Meeting of the HRC Steering Committee acknowledged that ‘some means of allowing the centre’s proposals to be scrutinized by an academic body had to be devised, but fears were expressed that affiliation with either IADS [sic], SGS or the faculty of Arts created problems’.11

So the issue of affiliation was back in the too-hard basket, where in fact it was still winding up thirty years down the track. Donaldson of course did not mind. He thought that the best course for the HRC for the time being would be to seek to achieve some form of independent status within the IAS, but it was by no means a matter of urgency. He soon had a far more serious problem on his hands, in any event: the year which had progressed so promisingly ended in tragedy, not only causing severe emotional distress to the personnel of the Centre, but also plunging it back into the organisational problems that they had hoped to escape from. Grahame Johnston had joined the HRC as Deputy Director on 1 December 1976. He died suddenly on 21 December. Professor A.D. Hope observed in a characteristically graceful eulogy that

With his wide-ranging skills, his great bibliographical experience, and his deep and mature scholarship, it is peculiarly tragic that [Johnston] did not live to take up
the post in the Humanities Research Centre for which his various gifts and wide knowledge of the workings and personalities of the world of the Humanities would have made him an ideal appointment.

Hope also referred to Johnston’s ‘cheerful and companionable nature,’ which experience had already shown would have been not only ideal but in fact quite essential qualities for effective service as Director or Deputy.12

So it was necessary to try once again to find an academic partner for the Director. Johnston’s tragic death at least provided an opportunity for the Centre ‘to look again with an open and critical mind at its total needs,’ as Donaldson told the Advisory Committee. What this meant in particular was reconsidering the issue of requiring the appointee to be both Deputy and Bibliographer. That position had been seen originally as one of ‘very considerable importance in the Centre,’ while the concept of the ‘Centre in a library’ was still being entertained. It was apparently still being entertained in 1974, when the Advisory Committee agreed that ‘steps should be taken to advertise a single senior post of HRC Bibliographer and Deputy Director.’ However, it had now been agreed that ‘within its own Reading Room the HRC should hold only a small collection of reference materials . . . and a few books of general academic interest.’ So the position of Bibliographer was now a less essential matter, while Donaldson felt that it had ‘become increasingly apparent . . . that the post of deputy Director is an essential one.’ He accordingly suggested that ‘we would do better if we divided the job in two . . . It may be relevant also to consider here the question of the position of Research Secretary.’13

All this made complete sense to the Advisory Committee. It was ‘considered essential to the academic standing of the Centre that the Director should be allowed the opportunity of pursuing his own research and also that he should have in the Centre a senior colleague.’ A Deputy should therefore be sought with interests in European studies, since this was Donaldson’s own area of expertise and presumably the area on which the HRC was still expected to concentrate. The Committee also agreed that the bibliographical needs of the Centre could ‘be met with the appointment of someone at a level lower than that of Professor,’ and that the person appointed ‘should be entrusted also with certain editorial functions.’14 However, the Vice-Chancellor had warned that it was unlikely that the HRC could expect an increase in its budgetary allocation for 1977, so any new additions to the staff would have to be paid for out of its existing
allocation, which meant that the Centre would have to look forward to functioning with more staff and much less money.

This would seem to mean that the Centre would have to be satisfied with doing fewer things better, or at least more easily. But the only areas in which the HRC could reduce its activities in practice was the Visiting Fellows programme, which was exactly what it was understood from the outset would be the primary focus of the Centre, and perhaps the Conferences, which would be a primary function of any academic institution. The strategic vision was clear from the outset: the Centre, it was explained in its Annual Report to Parliament for 1975, had ‘given special attention to certain areas of study which are at present not strongly established in Australia, for example, interdisciplinary studies, music and fine arts’. It was decided for 1976 to stimulate work in a wide area of subjects in the humanities. The results were impressive. Hans Kuhn convened an *Old Norse Workshop*, devoted to the twelfth century Icelandic polymath Snorri Sturluson, which drew 40 participants, all the more remarkable because the name and fame of Snorri Sturluson were not all that familiar this side of Sydney Heads; another conference on *Shakespearean Comedy* had attracted 100 visitors, a third on *Phenomenology* drew 80, and a
fourth on *Parody* drew 60, or over 280 visitors in all; and the associated David Nichol Smith conference, which the HRC had co-sponsored since 1974, convened by poet, literary critic and Reader in English at ANU Dr Robert Brissenden, was attended by a further 114 people.

The quality of the Visiting Fellow applicants was not in question, as Donaldson was able to confirm when Anthony Low observed that ‘we haven’t yet got the Isaiah Berlins to the HRC,’ perhaps alluding to the fact that the History of Ideas Unit of RSSS had actually been honoured with a visit by the great historian of ideas. Donaldson recalls Anthony Low’s strong support of the HRC. He took the remark on the half-volley: he admitted that ‘Isaiah Berlin we have not invited,’ but for the reason that he ‘has recently been a visitor in the History of Ideas Unit.’

Moreover, the fact was that we have quite deliberately tried to avoid filling the Centre solely with distinguished septuagenarians . . . I believe that the intellectual health of the Centre depends upon our mixing younger scholars with older scholars, mixing those who are writing their first major book with those who have many major books behind them.

The Advisory Committee had indeed resolved back in 1973 to invite old, not to say very old scholars only if they were of unusual eminence and were ‘still flexible enough to communicate with other scholars.’ But the Centre had had, ‘and shall soon have, some very eminent visitors from within the humanities.’ He then proceeded to list some, none of whom had yet reached septuagenarian status:

John Shearman, Deputy Director of the Courtauld Institute and one of the most distinguished art historians in Britain today . . . Jean Bony, described by Niklaus Pevsner as without doubt the internationally leading authority on Gothic architecture, Roy Strong, Director of the V & A wants to come, J.A.W. Bennett, one of the greatest living English mediaevalists; Leon Edel, without doubt the world authority on Henry James; Northrop Frye, a legendary figure in the literary world . . .

All except Sir Roy Strong had indeed come to the Centre in those years, Edel providing a report which evoked the varied delights of his sojourn at the Centre in truly Jamesian style. ‘My sense of nourishment,’ he told Donaldson,
was great . . . For me, the natural beauty of the surroundings, the fascinating bird-life, the opportunity to explore the flora and fauna of the land, the sense of the bush, the taste of Australian wine, the savouring of local expression and manners – and a thousand other impressions of the mind and senses linger with me and make me nostalgic even as I write . . . I cannot resist telling my story of holding a motherless baby kangaroo I came upon in the bush (unforgettable the delicacy and tenderness of the little creature).

Happily, he found a supply of Australian wines when he returned to his home to refresh his nostalgia. The subsequent fate of the baby kangaroo is not recorded, unlike that of the young wombat whom the great philosopher Richard Rorty encountered in similarly forlorn circumstances.

Quantity had been achieved along with quality: in the three years of its existence the HRC had had ‘nearly fifty Visiting Fellows . . . and a lot more short-term visitors of one kind and another. From the beginning of 1976 . . . to the end of second term 1977, nearly two hundred papers will have been given in the Centre, in conferences, lunchtime talks, and work-in-progress seminars’. 16 There had also been an array of a dozen assorted conferences and seminars held since that first critical four-day conference on ‘The Impact of 17th and 18th Century Philosophy on Modern Thought’, organised by Peter Herbst in 1974.

It was an incredible record for an organisation which still consisted basically of only a Director, a Research Secretary, a secretary, a part-time bibliographer and a typist. It might well have been suggested that seldom had so much been done for so many by so few with so little. It was also, to say the least, inconvenient that the Visiting Fellowships posed an increasing financial burden, as the University made no provision for necessary increases in their grants in the way it did for academic salaries. What was most remarkable was that the Centre had already achieved marked growth, and there was evidence that its activities had been appreciated not simply in Canberra but throughout Australia. Nor was Donaldson concerned merely to try to defend the HRC on the basis of its record of past achievements: he was more than ready to propose ways in which the Centre might adapt appropriately to changing and increasingly unfavourable circumstances, and in particular how it could better serve the interests of ANU, as well as those of the general world of the humanities. He
accordingly set himself to prepare a massive discussion paper, ‘The HRC: the next phase,’ for consideration by the Advisory Committee. The HRC had been in existence for three years. It was, he suggested, ‘an appropriate time to take stock of what we have done so far, and to think critically about the next phase of the Centre’s development.’ The first thing to think about was clearly the extent to which the original vision of the Centre had been affected by the way in which the economic climate had altered for the worse. The HRC was facing hard times, like the rest of the University. But the present financial cutbacks affected the HRC more than many other parts of the University . . . because they come at such an early stage of the Centre’s history, at a time when we had hoped for rapid growth. Schemes and dreams that looked realizable five years ago, three years ago, even eighteen months ago, may now look altogether less plausible.

The problem of finance was compounded by the fact that ‘the larger notion of publicly subsidized research in the humanities has never been firmly established in Australia’: there was ‘nothing in this country equivalent to the National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States,’ and ‘only a small proportion of funds disbursed by the ARG and bodies such as the Myer Foundation goes to the humanities . . .’ These financial constraints made all the more important the role of the HRC in ‘beginning to take on the role of catalyst and nurse to other activities in the humanities throughout Australia.’ It was indeed ‘in a unique position to help and be helped by other centres, institutes and societies, which are normally more highly specialised and less well funded.’ He might have added that they could not, practically speaking, have been more exiguously staffed.

This role was made possible by the fact that the HRC had been ‘working on a pretty broad front,’ as a consequence ‘not of irresolution but of deliberate policy.’ But the legitimate question had to be asked ‘what the Australian National University is actually getting out of the HRC, apart from the general stimulus of visitors and conferences.’ These themselves were of great importance: the deteriorating financial situation meant that there was ‘altogether less mobility in the universities,’ with a real risk of ‘consequent intellectual stagnation or ossification. In such a situation, a centre like the HRC, with its strong emphasis on a visiting fellowship scheme, becomes more important than ever. It is a potential source of new energy and new ideas.’ But
there were more practical things that might be done: he was concerned that ‘the HRC and its visitors have not been as closely integrated with the actual work of the University as they might have been; they have existed rather as a pleasant overlay to it.’ He himself had continued to ‘do some undergraduate teaching and supervision of postgraduate students in the Department of English; and Visiting Fellows often give occasional lectures and classes at undergraduate and graduate levels for Departments within the faculty of Arts.’ The HRC could not enrol undergraduate students, because it simply ‘did not have the resources to cope with them.’ However, a ‘decision to enrol postgraduate students in the HRC would bring us into line with the other main research areas of the ANU.’ The Faculty of Arts had recently established undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Modern European studies, with a coursework MA; and Donaldson thought that the HRC ‘might usefully play a major part, especially at graduate level, in these courses or in courses like them.’ Since many of the Fellows were in fields of European Studies or were from distinguished European Universities this was a logical conclusion. Among other things this would ‘allow us at once to build upon and to boost a developing interdisciplinary activity within the University.’ Some changes would need to be made: Visiting Fellows would have to be asked to make a contribution to postgraduate teaching and also, ‘if they wished, occasionally to undergraduate teaching.’ There was ‘a further important consequence of these proposals. If we are to entertain the possibility of a close academic relationship of this sort with the Faculty of Arts, it seems logical to think also of a close administrative relationship.’ Donaldson admitted that he and other members of the Advisory Committee ‘were once apprehensive’ of such a relationship; but it ‘might now be both workable and desirable’.17

All this was naturally welcome to the Committee, particularly Donaldson’s proposal that the HRC should become involved in the teaching of Modern European Studies: fears had been expressed that ‘the present faculty of Arts course in Modern European studies was weighted towards the Social Sciences,’ and it was suggested that ‘the Centre might redress the balance towards the humanities, especially literature, music, fine arts . . . ’ It was also suggested that the Centre ‘should have a continuing project to which it would devote a substantial part of its resources’.18 All of which was most appropriate for the HRC, except that its financial resources were becoming increasingly limited and its human resources literally could not have been more limited. Nevertheless, without question, the HRC
was to add immeasurably to the quality of European studies and to the teaching of the humanities generally at ANU. However, it was not until 2002 that the HRC would gain any financial recognition for its substantial teaching contributions to ANU across many disciplines when the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Chubb, allowed the Centre (after nearly thirty years of operation) finally to enrol its own graduate students and to receive funding for them.

Donaldson took a year’s study leave from 11 August 1977 to 4 August 1978, to visit the United Kingdom, Poland and Vienna and to complete a book on Lucretia and the establishment of the Roman Republic. The indefatigable Professor Ralph Elliott agreed to serve as Acting Director, as well continuing to sit on the Advisory and Steering Committees. The year 1977 had been most satisfactory for the Centre all round. Dr J.C. (Chris) Eade had joined the team in March as Research Fellow, with special responsibility for bibliography and editorial work. He inevitably acquired other responsibilities as well, contacting future Visiting Fellows in order that their research requirements might be met as far as was practicable by the time they arrived, assisting in the planning of the proposed Directory of Research in the Humanities within Australia and New Zealand and helping to run the fifth David Nichol Smith seminar. It would always be a case of all hands to the pumps at the HRC, but at least there was another pair of hands to pump with.

This was also the first year when Donaldson’s new strategy was put into effect of adopting an annual theme for the activities of the Centre, naturally to be announced well in advance for the benefit of prospective applicants. It was a decision at once critical, defining and long-pondered. It had originally been contemplated that ‘the HRC, once established, would mark out for itself a particular patch of academic territory, a special field of research,’ Donaldson recalled, ‘within which it would seek to achieve international distinction. The most frequently canvassed options were Byzantine studies; Renaissance studies; and eighteenth-century studies; but these were just examples. It might have been anything. The library would reflect this concentration, and be a specialized collection within a clearly defined field.’ It was to be left to the first Director to make the determining choice. Donaldson however had felt when first appointed that such a decision was not appropriate to his initial ‘caretaker’ role. He was also by no means sure that this was the most rewarding way for the HRC to develop. He felt in particular that specialization might often be necessary in a country like the United States ‘because there
were already such a lot of competing humanities research centers that each had to develop an individual character, while here there were no centers of this kind at all; we hadn’t even started. If the HRC were to become (let’s say) a Byzantine Centre it might well achieve international distinction within that comparatively narrow brief, but it wouldn’t fulfil the hopes and expectations that people held for it, and might in time become an academic backwater.’

Donaldson had been relieved to discover during his visit to the United States in 1977 that not all the humanities research centers there had in fact followed the pattern of specialisation. Some had instead ‘developed a system of changing specialisms, by nominating a different theme for each year. Director of the Humanities Research Center at Wesleyan University Professor Hayden White proposed to Donaldson that such a strategy would, *inter alia,* respond to the besetting problem that ‘academics were wholly unreliable people, who when applying for a fellowship would swear that they were working on a topic related to the theme, but would have dropped that idea and moved on to something else by the time they arrived at the Centre; but that I shouldn’t worry about that. Whatever the Fellows were actually working on when they came, the theme provided a sense of community, a central conversational topic to which they’d pledged themselves, and in which they could all engage.’

And so it proved: conversational engagement and a sense of community would always be the essential features of the HRC and the ones recalled most fondly in the testimonies of past Fellows. There was also the great advantage of adaptability in a time of exploding innovation in Australian intellectual circles. It enabled the HRC ‘to play an innovative role, rather than entrenching itself in a traditional scholarly corner.’ The Centre would be greeting the future from the very outset. And the future could never have looked quite so unpredictable, nor the pace of change quite so disconcerting. Flexibility had never been quite so manifestly the key to relevance.

The theme chosen to inaugurate the new approach was that of translation, which, Donaldson explained, ‘involves problems of central interest to literary criticism, linguistics and to certain areas of the social sciences,’ and was therefore eminently suited to both the literary emphasis and the broad outreach of the Centre. Three conferences on the theme were organised by J.D. Frodsham, Foundation Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the School of Human Communication, Murdoch University, and were hailed as the first occasion in Australia when literary translation had been considered.
in such depth. There were 40 papers presented; the ANU Arts Centre performed for the first time in English the play *Amputation* by Norway’s foremost contemporary playwright Jens Bjørneboe with a translation by ANU scholar Solrun Hoaas; and there were readings of poetry in translation and an opera workshop of Benjamin Britten’s *Albert Herring*. There was also a non-thematic conference on Mannerism convened by Professor of Musicology at Adelaide Andrew McCredie, which drew 40 participants; and five seminars were ‘convened and planned by members of other Australian universities, in keeping with the Centre’s claim to hold a national status in addition to its special responsibilities to The Australian National University.’ Indeed, it could be said that it was now ‘acknowledged as a strong influence in humanities studies throughout Australia’ and was ‘achieving recognition overseas,’ as Donaldson reported happily.19

Comments of the latest intake of Visiting Fellows were at least as laudatory as those of their predecessors. John Shearman, the renowned Deputy Director of the Courtauld Institute, wrote to Donaldson
to thank you most sincerely for the invitation and warmth of your hospitality but also to congratulate you on the success of the enterprise. I dare say that the idea of an interdisciplinary conference on Mannerism raised a few eyebrows in Australia – it certainly did here – but the intellectual adventure was fully justified by the real stimulation that was produced . . . this was something different and much more productive . . . Such events at the H.R.C. must contribute something unique to scholarship in Australia and I am perfectly certain . . . that their effects percolate through the whole academic system, lifting the level of research and debate. I forgot to enquire who invented the H.R.C.; it would be nice if all academic engineering was as rational . . . All predictions of Australian hospitality were confirmed at every part of my journey, but no-one had told me of the excellence of Australian staff-work.20

Nor had the Visiting Fellows been merely enjoying themselves: they had delivered in all some 50 lectures in the course of the year, and the fact was that the Centre was creating an unmistakeable impact as well as an impression of intense and efficient scholarly enterprise. Professor McCredie told Anthony Low that he felt

impelled to . . . congratulate the Australian National
University on their creation of a Humanities Research Centre, now able to handle a rapid succession of important scholarly events with such apparently effortless expertise, and authoritative yet sensitive professionalism. For Australian studies in the humanities, the Centre is clearly destined to assume the function as the catalyst of advanced interdisciplinary studies, frequently providing academic leadership where it is most urgently needed, and generating new directions and perspectives in humanist scholarship. But apart from regenerating the humanities throughout Australasia, the Centre will project Australian scholarship abroad in a fashion almost unparalleled anywhere. The achievement of the Centre is already such that it deserves special consideration in the future planning of Australian universities. I sincerely trust both public and private instrumentalities will be made to recognize the importance of the Centre to the development of the humanities in Australia.²¹

It is prima facie sound policy to bring such considerations to the notice of the person at the top. However, the danger with such plaudits was that they could be taken to imply that the HRC was doing such a splendid job with the resources available to it already that there was no need to give it any more. The imperative necessity to relieve the pressure on personnel was made more urgent when Horan resigned in March 1978, to live happily in the Cotswolds and enjoy once again the social life of Oxford, as he had enjoyed most happily that of Canberra. He had been a most congenial presence at the HRC, especially in what had become the most significant role of making Visiting Fellows feel welcome. It would indeed hardly be possible to replace Horan’s combination of style, scholarship, administrative flair and warm sociability. ‘He loved the milieu in the HRC,’ Donaldson recalled; ‘and enjoyed meeting the visitors, and attending seminars . . . He had a large house off Melbourne Ave with a big garden and swimming pool,’ something of a rarity in Canberra, ‘and gave some wonderful parties.’²²

The HRC Steering Committee ‘re-affirmed the importance of the post of Deputy Director to the Centre’s proper functioning and its participation in planning and teaching European Studies in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts,’²³ which in effect meant asking the one person to do two jobs, which could only be a serious deterrent to anyone who might otherwise have been attracted by the prospect
of doing either. To assist the Director prior to the appointment of a Deputy, James Grieve was seconded from the Department of Romance Languages as Research Secretary, with his time to be divided equally between research and administration, as indeed was Donaldson’s time supposed to be. During his time undertaking administrative duties at the HRC he worked also on his own research and translations of Proust as well as continuing to teach in French studies in the Faculty. Eade, who had been appointed as Research Fellow in March 1977, continued his historical researches in astronomy and astrology as well as his bibliographical work editing an Early Imprint series and editing Centre publications. But the division was becoming ever more unequal as academics found themselves lumbered more and more with the minutiae of management. It appeared that the Deputy Director’s time would have to be divided too.

Some progress at least seemed to have been made on the question of incorporating the Centre within the ANU administrative structure: the University Council decided on 14 July 1978 that the HRC should ‘be associated with the School of General studies for resources allocation purposes and affiliated with the Faculty of Arts,’ which was the kind of relaxed arrangement that Donaldson preferred as least imposing
on the independence of the Centre, even though it offered the least opportunity for any kind of expansion.\textsuperscript{24} The Council also resolved that steps should be taken at last to fill the post of Deputy Director, which had for practical purposes never been filled. The post was to be advertised at professorial level, consideration being given to applicants with a special interest in Modern European studies. It was ‘likely that the successful applicant will work closely with colleagues in the School of General studies,’ which was consistent with the decision regarding the affiliation of the Centre.\textsuperscript{25} Donaldson advised the Steering Committee, now chaired by Ralph Elliott on Donaldson’s enthusiastic recommendation, that the position of Deputy should be ‘seen primarily as a research chair,’ which would mean that the appointee would be expected to spend most of his or her time doing research. The appointee would also of course ‘be required to assist the Director . . . in the day-to-day running and long-term planning of the Centre, and to deputise for him from time to time,’ which is just what a deputy would expect to have to do. ‘Day-to-day tasks in the Centre,’ Donaldson explained,

include the organization of conferences, seminars, talks, exhibitions, readings, and other activities, and supervision of the welfare of Visiting Fellows and other short-term visitors to the Centre, and of the centre’s secretarial and administrative staff. Long-term planning is done in conjunction with the HRC’s Advisory and Steering Committees, of which the Deputy Director (like the Director) is \textit{ex officio} a member . . . Both the Director and Deputy Director are also \textit{ex officio} members of the Faculty of Arts.

In addition to all this the lucky incumbent would also be a full-time Professor of Modern European Studies, ‘required to assume over-all responsibility for postgraduate and undergraduate programmes in Modern European Studies run in conjunction with the Faculty of Arts’\textsuperscript{26}.

The implications of Donaldson’s report were clear: it was being proposed that the present pressure on the Director should be relieved by appointing someone who would in their turn be subjected to the unreasonable pressure of having to do at least two full-time jobs. This factor would be sufficient to discourage anybody who was capable of doing either properly. Nor was the University prepared even to give assurance that there would be adequate administrative support.
available, as it had been confident enough to do when advertising the post of Director seven years before: Donaldson reminded Low that no separate budgetary provision was being made for the present position, just as none had been made when Grahame Johnston had been appointed, so it would hardly be possible to appoint additional secretarial staff. There was however no doubt of the necessity for the HRC ‘to begin to consolidate and for the Director to have a senior colleague,’ even though the Centre had been ‘overtaken by financial economies at a crucial stage of its early growth’.27 They would have to keep house somehow, as Abraham Lincoln observed of the Union, just before the Civil War began.

It was not surprising that the advertisement should have had the deterrent effect that Donaldson anticipated: more than 20 applications were received for the position, but only two made the short list, and ‘doubts were raised as to whether either candidate was perfectly suited to handle the two main areas of the job.’ Donaldson asked the obvious question: ‘are the two halves of the job really compatible? Are we not asking too much of a single person, to look after the Modern European Studies (and so some teaching in these courses) and at the same time give guidance to the HRC? There will,’ he continued, reiterating the obvious, ‘be frequent, and occasionally long, periods when the Deputy Director will have to stand in for the Director. In addition,’ he continued, again reminding the Committee of a fundamental consideration which all concerned would always need reminding of, ‘this is thought of as essentially a research position. Some of the applicants expressed the view that the job already looked as heavy as (if not heavier than) a normal teaching professorship.’ No applicant who had actually read the advertisement could indeed have possibly thought otherwise. Donaldson had accordingly proposed to the Electoral Committee

that we think of re-advertising the Deputy Directorship in different terms, dropping the Modern European studies component, and not specifying any particular field of interest. The position would be that of Deputy Director and Professor in the Humanities Research Centre. We should simply try to get the best available person: classicists, mediaevalists, musicologists, and others who may have been discouraged from applying last time around could now put in if they wished.

He would however still like ‘to explore ways in which the centre
might contribute in a positive and continuing way to the Modern European Studies programme . . . We may (for example) be able to plan some of our conferences and choose some of our visitors with Modern European studies needs in mind . . . On this whole question,’ he concluded typically, ‘it is important to think constructively’.28 That was the strategy adopted with considerable success in terms of ANU’s developing European studies programmes and the HRC’s contributions to European studies were acknowledged years later when ANU made a successful bid to the European Union for funding for a National Europe Centre. That new Centre began as an affiliate of the HRC which had done so much to make the University a focus for European scholarship.

Donaldson’s style of negotiation was always that of US Secretary of State George C. Marshall, who implored his officials ‘Don’t fight the problem, gentlemen: solve it!’ He had in fact already been doing some constructive thinking on ways in which the Centre might be seen to contribute more effectively to the University at large: he had reminded the Advisory Committee back in October 1978 that the original planning committee of the HRC had agreed early in 1970 that ‘the new Centre’s theme should be broadly defined as “The Expansion of European Intellectual and Cultural Traditions.”’ The Centre had continued to declare since its establishment that its general concern was with ‘European thought and culture and their influence overseas,’ which meant much the same thing. ‘So far, however,’ he considered,

this formula has been very loosely interpreted and applied, and it must be asked whether the spirit of that 1970 resolution has really been met. Many of the projects of Visiting Fellows and many of the Centre’s conferences have in fact been concerned with topics that may be described not unfairly as ‘Eurocentric’.

They certainly might be so described, and it might have seemed that it had been the intention of Richard Johnson, Partridge, Spate and the other founders of the Centre that that was just what the HRC should be doing. However, Donaldson had been impressed while in the United States by reports of a conference on the impact on the Old World of the discovery of the New. The application of such an approach to Australia would achieve a distinct shift from the original Eurocentric conception of the Centre; it would declare unambiguously what the role of the HRC actually was; and it would undoubtedly be more appropriate to Australian realities, geographic, economic and
increasingly social. In any case, Donaldson argued, the fact was that only a handful of Visiting Fellows ‘have been looking at problems relating to the transmission and transformation of European ideas overseas . . . It would seem that the time has come for the Centre either to abandon its declared theme or to make a more determined effort to work within it.’ He accordingly recommended that the Centre ‘take its general brief more seriously, devoting a year quite specifically to an Australian/European theme . . . the various ways in which the discovery of Australia affected European ways of thinking, perceiving, and creating’. 

The theme of ‘Australia and the European Imagination’ was accordingly approved for 1981. Meanwhile, there had been further gratifying success with the five major conferences organised in 1979 on the theme of ‘Drama’, particularly with respect to the critical factor of collaboration with other Australian universities and cultural institutions: two of the convenors were from the University of New South Wales, Donaldson reported; there had been theatrical workshops with local and invited actors; and displays had been supplied by the cultural services of some foreign embassies and the Centre presented a postgraduate course at ANU in methods of literary scholarship. A certain public relations problem seemed to have developed with the great metropolitan centres, however: there were reports that some academics in Sydney felt that the distinguished Visiting Fellows from overseas were wasted in the isolation of ANU, and would be much more profitably stationed in Sydney where they would have maximum contact with the maximum number of undergraduates. There was of course the consideration that some at least of the distinguished Visiting Fellows had chosen to come to Canberra precisely in order to have contact with the minimum number of undergraduates, and there were plenty of students around ANU for those who did wish to have contact. The Centre had been encouraging its Fellows to visit other universities around Australia in any case.

This did not mean that there was not a problem or that it should be ignored. One of the most fascinating and endearing features of the Australian scene has always been the scorn of the two great metropolitan centres for their federal capital, matched only by their distaste for each other. But the issue of jealousy and resentment in such quarters was too serious to be overlooked. Donaldson asked Professor Peter Herbst towards the end of 1979 if he would ‘care to go to Melbourne to talk to people about the HRC.’ Herbst ‘went in January, and spent some days in discussion, mainly with members of
the German Department at Monash and with [the] History of Ideas Unit.’ All the people with whom he spoke were ‘interested in the work of the HRC and keen on co-operating with us, but none of them thought that we had succeeded in making adequate contact with our colleagues in the State Universities or that we had made much of an impact on the Australian academic community in general.’ It seemed that the Bulletins of the HRC ‘were not widely read, and that most scholars in the humanities in Australia regarded the HRC as a “Canberra show”’, which was of course exactly what the Universities Council had intended the HRC should not be: its operations were to be, on the contrary, ‘of a kind to benefit directly teaching and research in the humanities throughout the country.’

Herbst recognised that it was inevitable in the nature of Australian society that many people at the State Universities should be ‘envious of Canberra, and resented an alleged advantage of the ANU in being able to invite and monopolise overseas visitors.’ Two colleagues to whom Herbst spoke in Melbourne argued that the existence of the HRC, far from being a boon, was a positive disadvantage to them: they said that

the HRC was regarded with awe by University administrators, as a sort of national pinnacle of research in the humanities, and also as quite rich, and so we in Canberra were expected to facilitate and to fund research projects of which the State University administrators were then happy to wash their hands. In effect the academic administrators said to members of the faculties: “if your work were of sufficient merit and if it satisfied a genuine academic need, the HRC would by now have supported you. They have not supported you: ergo, your work is not worth supporting, so you won’t get any help from us”.

This was a real problem with the most serious implications for the HRC: nothing could be more ominous for a tiny institution with overworked personnel and facing ongoing financial constraints than to be viewed generally as lavishly funded and resourced. However, Herbst could be counted on to have some practical suggestions to remedy this alarming state of affairs: he proposed that the HRC should ‘improve its communications network by finding a suitable person in each university, or at least in each major university city . . . to act as our agent and informant’: the Centre should in other words ‘compile a list of “Friends of the HRC”’. It should also act as
‘a centre for co-ordinating and perhaps facilitating some of the work being done by members of the chapters in the State Universities’; give ‘serious thought to the possibility that some of our conferences might be conducted in cities interstate’; and ‘have more contact and friendlier relations with the History of Ideas Unit [in RSSS], and . . . plan a common activity.’

Herbst’s suggestion was promptly taken up: the Steering Committee resolved that Donaldson, Herbst and Grieve should be ‘charged with proposing the names of people to act as “local agents” for the Centre in other Universities’. Sympathetic academics were accordingly invited to explain to those other universities the mutual benefits to be achieved by collaboration with the HRC. The response was enthusiastic: liaison groups were established over the next fifteen years in virtually every institution of higher education in Australia and New Zealand; and Ann Curthoys, later Professor of History in The Faculties, who acted as convener at the University of Technology, Sydney, during the 1980s considered that they were ‘extremely valuable then both for the “other universities” and the HRC itself’.

It had been possible to do something about improving communications. Nothing much could be done about the pervasive distrust and resentment of Canberra inside as well as outside academe. It was no doubt most gratifying to be regarded with awe by the great State Universities, but the notion of the HRC as being ‘quite rich’ must have struck Donaldson as more than a bit rich, especially when the financial situation was about to be made even more challenging by the long-awaited appointment as Deputy Director in May 1981 of Graeme Wilber Clarke, Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Melbourne since 1969, a classical scholar of imposing international distinction and another New Zealander, like his ill-fated predecessor. He at least was not going to be required to teach and manage a full-time course as well as performing the functions of Deputy; but the Committee’s response to Herbst’s report meant that ‘in addition to his other duties, Professor Clarke will act as the central convenor of the HRC’s Liaison Groups, and co-ordinate visits by HRC Visiting Fellows to other Australian universities’.

Clarke was 47, a year older than Donaldson, energetic, fit, enthusiastic and supremely equipped for the role. He was indeed one of only three academics during Anthony Low’s tenure as Vice-Chancellor to be appointed without advertisement. His arrival must have seemed like a gift from heaven to Donaldson, despite the increased financial stresses it incurred. It was not just that he had at
last acquired an academic colleague of the very highest distinction, after nine years of doing without one at all. Clarke would in fact prove to be in Donaldson’s own words, ‘an absolutely wonderful colleague: a superb administrator, calm, quick, wise, unruffable; a top scholar in his field; an excellent friend . . . Graeme’s arrival dramatically increased the scope of the Centre, and gave us new strength’. It was praise fully deserved. Clarke would demonstrate during a term at the
HRC even longer than Donaldson’s the ideal managerial combination of authority and approachability: his hand was felt in every aspect of the Centre from decisions on future directions to arrangements to have visitors met at the airport or the bell which summoned all present to the collegial morning and afternoon coffee; an unending stream of yellow stickers in his small, exquisite and beautifully legible handwriting kept staff apprised of his decisions; but his door was ever open for genial, courteous and decisive discussion on any aspect of HRC business. It is interesting in this connection that Clarke later referred to Donaldson in almost exactly the same terms of admiration, affection and respect which Donaldson had used to describe Clarke. It was in effect a perfect partnership. That always helps.

Donaldson had meanwhile taken another short break, this time to attend a conference in Germany from 26 June through 13 July 1981. Ralph Elliott had just returned from six months at the National Humanities Center at Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, and duly took over as Acting Director during Donaldson’s absence, with James Grieve to ‘look after the day to day affairs of the Centre’.34 Clarke however made his presence felt at once, even though he was not required officially to assume his duties as Deputy until January 1982: he, Donaldson and Grieve met with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts in June 1981 to discuss the ‘increasing volume of work in the Centre . . . the spreading of the Centre’s reputation and the consequent increase in the number of applicants and in the number of good candidates who are rejected,’ not to mention ‘the growth of projects like the recently formed liaison groups.’ All this meant that the Centre could ‘justify the need for one and a half academic-cum-administrative staff, in addition to the Director and Deputy Director.’ A likely need for secretarial assistance was also seen ‘in view of the centre's acquisition of a word-processor and the volume of work this would generate,’ no doubt in consideration of the invariable effect of technology to increase work rather than diminish it.

Donaldson proposed accordingly that an approach should be made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor,

arguing the opportunities for change in the Centre, given the changed circumstances, in particular the Government’s and the University’s concern with “centres of excellence”, with a view to having the Centre’s salaries budget increased by the small proportion that would be necessary to enable this proposed staffing growth to occur.
Nor did it seem unreasonable that the HRC should be regarded as qualifying as a ‘centre of excellence’ in anybody’s language: the International Association of University Professors of English, for example, referred in its Bulletin for summer 1979 to the HRC as ‘the main beacon for visitors to Australia’, and declared that ‘the Centre is beginning to provide for Australia something akin to the attractions and amenities of the great American foundations like the Huntington’, which of course enjoyed far more lavish funding. Donaldson anticipated that this might raise the question in the administrative mind, ‘Why then should a Centre of this kind, which is apparently functioning successfully on its present resources, be thought deserving of additional funding?’ And he had the answers ready. Australian universities were becoming ‘increasingly static and immobile places’ as academic funding throughout the nation continued to be reduced year by year. They were indeed already ‘suffering from a kind of siege mentality.’ A major problem for Australian universities generally and for the humanities in particular was ‘how to introduce an element of change and growth during the present period of sharp recession.’ Here, he proposed, the HRC, ‘like its North American counterparts, can play a vital role.’

But it could hardly play such a role under its current budgetary constraints. ‘Scarcely had the HRC come into existence,’ Donaldson reminded the Committee, ‘when the financial climate in Australian universities changed dramatically. As a result, the HRC has been able to reach what ANU’s Vice-Chancellor [Anthony Low] has described as “no more than an absolute minimum size”. One could not indeed have a more absolute minimum size than one academic, as was still the case at the time and would be the case on not infrequent occasions in the future: the fact was that the only continuing appointment in the Centre had been that of Director, who had been assisted by a Research Secretary and a Research Fellow, both of whose appointments were to terminate that year, as indeed was Donaldson’s. A Deputy Director was to assume his multifarious duties in January 1982, ‘but no additional funding is available to the Centre for this post’. Hence, that appointment, ‘while strengthening the Centre very materially,’ would ‘nevertheless necessitate a reduction in certain of its present activities.’ This applied particularly to the Visiting Fellows program, which was essentially what the HRC had been created for in the first place. And here the HRC was literally the victim of its own success: ‘as the Centre’s international reputation dramatically grows,’ Donaldson concluded, ‘so does the annual number of Visiting Fellow
applications. But many applicants already had to be turned away, including some of the highest distinction, such as a Fellow of the British Academy and the Immediate Past President of the British Historical Association’.35

Donaldson’s appeals were given added cogency by the fact that the conference programs for 1980 and 1981 had witnessed a significant advance in what might be described as the catalytic, interdisciplinary and generally interactive roles of the Centre. Five conferences on Romanticism and Revivals had been conceived in 1980 by the ever-resourceful Hans Kuhn, convenors for which had been drawn from the Faculty of Arts, the Canberra College of Advanced Education and RSSS, with the assistance of the National Library of Australia, the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Australian Historical Association, with contributions to funding for visitors from the British Council, the Faculty of Arts and the Pro Helvetia Association. The six conferences in 1981 on the theme of Australia and the European Imagination had ‘brought together sociologists, anthropologists, cartographers, film-makers and geographers together with the philosophers, linguistic and literary scholars, musicologists and historians who are the usual denizens of the HRC’.36 But perhaps most significant and certainly most satisfying to Donaldson’s mind was that ‘Rhys Jones’s chapter on “Seeing the First Australians” that came out of the HRC meeting perfectly captured the kind of Montaignian perspective that I’d hoped the conference as a whole would achieve (an Aboriginal view of the chaotic nature of white Australian social and cultural behaviour).’37 There could be no question any more of the HRC’s range of activities being constrained by an inappropriately Eurocentric perspective: it was truly ‘working on a pretty broad front,’ and most certainly as a result of deliberate policy, not of any irresolution.

The Centre could hardly have embraced the humanities more widely or interacted with other organisations and institutions more broadly, given the resources available. The problem was how to make greater resources available while the HRC remained a centre unto itself. Ralph Elliott had been considering some possible options during the months he had spent in what he would later describe as ‘the shady groves’, ‘the blessed sylvan seclusion’ and ‘idyllic working environment’ of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. He delivered some of the fruits of his reflections on his return in a deeply thoughtful as well as eloquent article on the possible future of the HRC. The establishment of the Centre, he observed, had been
seen as acknowledgement that the humanities still mattered and that their well being depended upon sound scholarship pursued in congenial surroundings. But the gap between them and the natural and social sciences remained unbridged as long as humanists continued to work in isolation, not from each other, but from their peers in other realms. It was the recognition of this fact, he continued, ‘which prompted what is probably the main difference in policy between the HRC and its American counterpart, the National Humanities Center . . .’ This difference was

summed up in the NHC’s aim ‘to seek as fellows humanistically inclined scholars in the natural and social sciences and the professions as well as scholars in fields conventionally identified with the humanities . . . Even the architecture of the Center’s building, situated in the heart of a North Carolina forest, is designed to foster the combination of private study and participation in wide ranging discussion. There are no outside distractions except walks among the pine trees.

It might have been retorted that ANU was set pretty substantially in bush, if not precisely forest; that there was more than adequate provision for walks among the gum trees; and that few visitors to Canberra were wont to complain about an excess of outside distractions. However, Ralph Elliott’s fundamental argument was that ANU attracted ‘many scientists, social scientists and other visitors to the research schools’, but few of them interact with the HRC . . . Perhaps the possibility of regular joint fellowships at the HRC and other ANU research centres should be explored . . . A rare opportunity was missed when the HRC was affiliated with the Faculty of Arts, with which it has obvious affinities, rather than with the Research School of Social Sciences or that of Pacific Studies, which would have fostered the kind of interchange so fruitfully pursued in North Carolina . . . The HRC has not been neglectful in some of its sister disciplines outside the traditional humanities . . . but perhaps its horizon might be widened still further.

And he concluded with the resounding declaration that
The more the humanities are assailed in contemporary society as irrelevant, anachronistic, and expensive luxuries, the more should humanists be prepared to look beyond their own disciplines and beyond the humanistic disciplines themselves. This is essential if the humanities are to play a continuing, and fruitful role in a society increasingly uncertain of inherited values and seemingly incapable of solving the problems posed thereby . . . The basic aim of both centres is to encourage the writing of good books, he added as a salutary reminder of the bottom line.

Elliott noted that the NHC could offer three times as many fellowships as the HRC and had had as many fellows in three years as the HRC had had in seven. However, he considered that this was ‘purely a function of size and of the American custom of “thinking big.”’

Elliott’s breadth of vision always represented the essence of what the HRC was about. It was a breadth of vision shared by Donaldson and Clarke. But it was not alas the case that it was just a matter of thinking big. It was also a matter of money. And the fact was that there was to be no extra funding for the Centre: indeed, as Grieve sadly informed the Committee the HRC had to expect a cut of five per cent in its budget for 1982 by comparison with the previous year’s, which ‘represents a substantial reduction in funding’. It seemed as if the Centre was to be denied even the word processor needed to generate more work than its staff could handle: the Business Manager reported to the Bursar on 22 September that ‘the special bid of $15 000 to meet the cost of the purchase of a wordprocessing facility for the H.R.C. has been deferred’. But a word processor was in fact forthcoming in October. It was ‘second-hand and on hire’.41
Notes

2 Morton W. Bloomfield to Ralph Elliott, 3 Dec. 1978.
4 Horan to DVC, 11 June 1975.
5 Donaldson to E. Helgeby, 11 June 1975.
7 Sasha Grishin to the authors, 23 July 2003.
8 Letter of appointment to Donaldson, quoted in M.G. Bouquet to Mr Dicker, ‘Director of the Humanities Research Centre Consideration of extension of appointment,’ 25 June 1980.
9 The ANU Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies, Board of the School of General Studies, Joint Committee on Centres and Units, 2525/1976, 8 Sept. 1976.
10 Donaldson to all members of the HRC Advisory Committee: Report of Joint Committee on ANU Centres & Units, 30 Sept. 1976.
13 Donaldson to all members of HRC Advisory Committee: Post of Deputy Director and Bibliographer, 12 Apr. 1977.
14 13th Meeting, HRC Advisory Committee, 12 Apr. 1977.
16 Donaldson to Anthony Low, 4 July 1977; Leon Edel to Donaldson, 9 Nov. 1976.
18 Horan to Steering Committee, 16 Aug. 1977.
21 Andrew D. McCredie to Low, 29 June 1977.
22 Donaldson to authors, 15 June 2002.
22nd Meeting of Steering Committee, 11 Apr. 1978.
24 Extract from minutes of meeting of Council, 14 July 1978.
26 Donaldson to Steering Committee, 15 Sept. 1978.
28 Donaldson to members of the HRC Steering Committee, 11 Dec. 1979.
30 Peter Herbst to Donaldson, 14 Apr. 1980.
31 33rd Meeting of Steering Committee, 3 June 1980.
34 Donaldson to authors, 15 June 2002.
35 Grieve to all members of the Steering Committee, Report on discussion between the Director, the Deputy Director elect, the Dean and the Research Secretary, 23 June 1981.
37 Donaldson to the authors, 14 June 2003.