

# Portrait of a life enthralled in politics and academe

John Wanna

I was born on Thursday 20 May 1954 in the UK in the West Riding of Yorkshire at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary. My parents then lived in a cold, damp terrace house in Lockwood, a southside district in the borough of Huddersfield, a textile town with a fierce streak of independence. Later we moved slightly further out to Crosland Moor, closer to foothills of the Pennines, into a better semi-detached house with a garden and a garage and a lilac tree, my favourite spot. I was the eldest of four boys (and later three when one died as a baby) who spent much of their early childhood in the UK. Growing up, besides schooling and sport, we worked in my father's bakery, selling football programs at home games for Huddersfield Town, and I did some work as a junior clerk on a weighbridge for the new M62 motorway being built nearby, and in a warehouse supplying local supermarkets.

Decades later my daughter Erinn traced our family tree back nearly 300 years – all of whom came from within the immediate West Riding region. They were an odd collection of millworkers, weavers, cotton spinners, agricultural labourers, boiler workers, railway workers and porters, coal-lumpers and horse thieves. My maternal great-grandmother, whose husband had died when relatively young, and whom I spent time with as a boy, spent about 25 years bringing jugs of ale up from a cellar to the front bar in a Netherton public house. This early background was vastly different to my life in Australia.

As far back as I can remember, I always had an abiding interest in politics even from seven or eight years old. From the age of 10, I delivered morning newspapers six days a week for around five years. I routinely

delivered around 12 different newspaper mastheads each with party-aligned partisan identities, and each with bewilderingly different accounts of what was happening in politics (much of which would now be called 'fake news', if not propaganda). Many times I tried to reconcile these wildly divergent accounts of politics and events. I remember asking adults how such deeply divergent views could be reconciled and rarely got an answer let alone a sensible answer – which only deepened my interest in the political aspects of societies.

Growing up in a working-class town in the north of England taught those who were ambitious to endeavour to improve their circumstances; it also starkly illustrated that things well organised and administered could massively impact on the quality of life of those around you in the community. Some neighbouring towns or parts of nearby cities were entirely dysfunctional at that time and local residents would have had little to expect from life chances. Other places were well administered and the local authorities took pride in their own public service to the community, championing neighbourhood progress and community development. Also my enthralling fascination with politics and history gradually led me to ask questions about how the 'modern state' was organised. For instance, how did government work, both in its 'external face' for public consumption and internally, in more covert ways to shape agendas? How did bureaucracies operate, including what were their strengths or advantages and what were their deficiencies or shortcomings, with their impersonal and autonomous formats? I always believed in the imperative for social improvement but maintained a sceptical disposition towards many of the proposed schemes and motives of those making the decisions. For me, it was not just about the obligation of 'speaking truth to power' as Aaron Wildavsky once ventured, but a deep-rooted scepticism about whether things would turn out as planned or intended (as Peter Self explored in many of his works).

Like so many English families in the 1960s and 1970s we joined the wave of aspiring migrants sailing to Australia as 'ten-pound Poms' in search of better prospects, better life opportunities and better weather (the so-called 'ideal settlers' in Australian demographer 'Mick' Borrie's terms – they came, they procreated and they worked). Indeed, my parents had gained permission to migrate to Australia when I was around four, but as my younger brother and I at the time were the only grandchildren, they were dissuaded by the three remaining grandparents. Although we left extended family behind, we were particularly glad to be leaving the foggy, wet and

bleak textile town where future job prospects for my parents and the boys were definitely uninviting. ‘No regrets’ was our family’s unshakable motto as we transposed to the Antipodes.

In the UK, I attended six different government schools, going through the system because my parents kept moving. I took to school because it combined three passions – learning, reading and sport (football). I eventually finished at one of the new comprehensive schools set up in 1965 by the Wilson Labour Government,<sup>1</sup> Fartown County Secondary School, where students were streamed according to ability. I was in the academic stream and, topping the A class for two years, finished school just turning 15 with five GCE (general certificate of education) ‘O’ levels and seven CSEs (certificate of secondary education), with seven firsts and one second in metalwork. At a final career advisory session in June 1970, I was told I should do ‘A’ levels and go to one of the local universities – Leicester, Nottingham or Sheffield was suggested. This confirmed my interest in further study, but because we were emigrating I could not enrol in a polytechnic to undertake my ‘A’ levels as a few of my friends did. Instead, I finished off my schooling at Brighton High School in Adelaide’s southern suburbs, where I was regarded as some strange being who had a Monty Pythonesque Yorkshire accent. I could swim but not ride a surfboard, I could play soccer but not Aussie rules; but I could also play chess and became the school’s top player in the chess team on board number one.

In South Australia’s matriculation exam I did well in geography (ostensibly coming top in the state), and in modern history, biology and English, but scraped a pass in the faddish so-called ‘modern mathematics’ (all vectors, algebra and calculus). I was the last year to be encouraged to continue the cursive writing style, thereafter for a while all classes were taught an abrupt style of italics. These results got me into the University of Adelaide in early 1971 (I also had an offer from Flinders University, but in those days very few buses connected the university to surrounding suburbs,

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1 Prime Minister Harold Wilson was born in Huddersfield (the district of Milnsbridge, which was next door to Crossland Moor) and as a child I was tremendously impressed with him for his achievements, although he was not our local member, as he was elected to the Lancashire seats of Ormskirk and the Merseyside seat of Huyton. I remember visiting many times the little hospital where he was born, and to this day have many of the books he wrote and the colossal biography of him by Ben Pimlott. It was inspirational to me that the prime minister came from our town, which was by no means the epicentre of the UK – it was widely disregarded, as if it did not exist, by folk in the southern counties.

whereas I could easily get to Adelaide University on the train). I attended university before Whitlam introduced free tertiary education (the old days of postwar Commonwealth Scholarships that just met tuition fees but initially provided no subsistence). Nevertheless, from 1974, I did benefit from the government's free university education policy for a couple of years, receiving a very small stipend even though my parents' income remained modest. In those days only a small proportion of school leavers went to university (a 'chosen few') and Australia had only around 15 universities proper.

Being the first in my wider family ever to go to university, the transition to tertiary education was a bit daunting and awe-inspiring. However, I increasingly took to the life, the patterns of studying and its academic rigor. I double majored in politics, with minors in history and some units in philosophy and economics. It was an exciting time to study politics. Lots of new issues of public policy were being addressed and contested. Moreover, Labor governments were such a recent novelty where I lived. In the early 1970s, South Australia had a very progressive reformist Labor Government headed by Premier Don Dunstan (I later reviewed his memoirs, entitled *Felicia: Political Memoirs* in 1982). At the federal level Gough Whitlam was prime minister, heading a paradigm-changing Labor Government but also an increasingly chaotic one. Both governments implemented many measures of lasting benefit, but also were characterised by dubious if not wayward judgements – something that sat with me for many decades.

I still remember Whitlam addressing students in the Adelaide University Union Cinema Theatre as prime minister in mid-1975. He talked about further plans for tertiary education and the end of the Vietnam War, but was questioned on what was Labor's policy towards the embryonic East Timor independence movement called Fretilin (questions I remember he refused to answer, probably so as not to offend the Indonesians!). What we did not know but suspected was that he had given a personal assurance to the Indonesian president not to oppose the annexation of the former Portuguese colony. With the collapse of the Portuguese junta in 1974, East Timor was declared independent after a period of insurgency by the Fretilin revolutionary front, triggering a bloody Indonesian invasion. Australia, to our shame, did not stand up to the Jakarta regime until 1999.

In 1975 I was invited to undertake fourth-year honours at Adelaide University, a mixture of coursework and thesis, and was required to settle on a 'topic'. I was assigned a supervisor, the local political historian RL (Bob) Reid with whom I had studied as an undergraduate. After some discussion, Bob suggested that I look at a public policy initiative currently underway that involved both incumbent Labor governments, intergovernmental relations and the dispensing of large amounts of public largesse. His suggestion was that I should look at the proposed 'New Murray Town' of Monarto on a greenfield site over the Mount Lofty Ranges, some 63 kilometres to the east of Adelaide. So, I did my honours thesis examining the 'virtual' proposal of Monarto from a political economy perspective. At the time, the federal government was financially supporting the concept of states developing 'new cities' to relieve population pressure on their capital cities and assist regional development. One of Whitlam's ambitions involved creating a Department of Urban and Regional Development (with the unenviable acronym of DURD) to plan these new cities scattered around Australia. Attempting to obtain new money for South Australia, Dunstan proposed to create the new city of Monarto, a project not entirely at the forefront of the Commonwealth's priority lists because Adelaide had low population growth and little congestion.

Monarto seemed a crazy and contentious scheme by the state government to establish an over-planned, futuristic new city on an entirely pristine site. The multifunction polis was supposedly to be an 'alternative' self-contained communal city of 200,000 people, free of cars, reliant on public transport and connected by bike paths and pedestrian footpaths (I still have some of the wild imaginary concept plans and glossy brochures spruiking the scheme). It would have an ornamental lake, golf course and areas for open air eating (surprise, surprise!) but no real industries; instead three large government departments related to land, agriculture and environment would be compulsorily relocated there (which caused a virtual riot in the public service and mass demonstrations by those significantly affected). It was nauseatingly 'nice' but totally impracticable.

The Monarto folly was a wonderfully peculiar prism through which to observe politics at play in the federation. I spoke to federal, state, local bureaucrats, and a bevy of town planners and in the end produced a critique of Labor's pie-in-the-sky planning; but I did come across a number of planners who would later become more significant to me. One was Peter Coaldrake, who was an urban geographer and later professor of public management (and the first to give me a continuing job at Griffith

University), and another was Mike Keating, a labour market economist in DURD and later secretary of Finance and then the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (with whom I collaborated after his retirement from the Australian Public Service [APS]). He was a big fan of my budgeting research, especially the documenting of Australia's reform trajectories.

Anyway, after years of faux 'Kodachrome' planning, not a single sod of earth was ever turned on the greenfield site. The entire money forwarded by the federal government was consumed by the initial land purchase, professional consultants and planners. Money that otherwise could have benefited regional growth in larger country towns like Murray Bridge, Mount Barker or Gawler was effectively wasted. But the Dunstonian pipedream that would eventually become an open park zoo earned me a high Div IIA honours degree. Sadly, my supervisor Bob Reid at Adelaide University died of a heart attack a few weeks after I got my results – I was not only distraught but also left without anyone to provide references, although some other Adelaide politics staff helped out and asked me to do a PhD.

University remained a strange world to the rest of my family. Both of my parents went onto the Adelaide campus only once; my mother to attend my PhD graduation in 1985 – totally puzzled as to why I was sitting on the podium with the professors and senior academic staff of the university. My father came in late 1982 to help me clear out my room in the Arts Faculty's Napier Tower (I was in the last room in the territory claimed by the politics department; the economists resided further down the corridor and on the floor below including Bruce Chapman, Judith Sloane, Geoff Harcourt and Cliff Walsh). My dad took one look at the full bookshelf and said, 'When do we take these back to the library?' 'No', I replied, 'they are mine and need packing up'. He was a curmudgeonly Yorkshireman who believed we only needed two types of books – instruction manuals and map books. When my third book came out (*Public Policy in Australia*) he took one look at it, and in his Yorkshire dialect said: 't'cover looks like toilet door', and then added without opening it 'Haven't you said all you have to say yet?' Even today, after some 50 books and the two extensive collections in the ANZSOG and UNSW Press series, all the chapters and articles published, as well as all the journal editing undertaken – he would be amazed but not necessarily impressed.

After honours, I spent two years living overseas mainly in the Netherlands taking a break, working, but thinking of further study at the University of Groningen in the most northern Dutch province. On inquiring, I was told to my disappointment that I had to take a transition year before I could begin a Master's degree in European politics. Instead, I returned to Australia, and secured a part-time place (but with no scholarship) at Flinders University, shared with a colleague Michael Sullivan, because while I had been away Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had imposed a strict rationing of postgraduate places in the university sector and any department even with modest numbers of postgrads had to curb places. After an enjoyable couple of years part-time with the Flinders politics department, working with Dean Jaensch, Bill Brugger, Andrew Mack and Geoff Stokes, I transferred back to Adelaide, my *alma mater*, to work with Bob Catley, who had secured me one of the few available postgraduate scholarships. By now in my PhD I was specialising in labour relations and, in particular, state regulation of unions and the industrial relations system more generally. Working with Bob Catley was inspiring, but I also worked closely with Doug McEachern, Greg O'Leary, Brian Abbey, Bruce McFarlane, Carol Johnson and fellow postgrads Jim Jose, Chris Nyland and Greg McCarthy. Tutoring undergraduates, from first- to third-year, I taught some wonderful students such as Peter Backhouse, who became a lecturer at Griffith then went into university administration, and Peter Mares, later a prominent ABC journalist and author. As the staff situation in the politics department was becoming a little dysfunctional at that time, Jim Jose and I organised a separate postgrad seminar series to which fellow students were welcome but staff could only attend if personally invited.

Working on my thesis on the politics of organised labour – mainly unions in the metal and vehicle industries – and ending with the Hawke Government's Accord agreements with the union movement – I spent a year at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, in New Zealand. It was the hardest year I ever worked in my academic career as they ruthlessly exploited the 'poor bunny' they had appointed to a one-year revolving lectureship. I was teaching convenor of the large first-year intake (a huge administrative job), took six tutorials – each with 20–25 students – all in one day, convened and taught a second-year subject in comparative politics later in the week, and taught a Masters-level course! I woke most days at 4.30 am to spend two to three hours on my thesis so that I made steady progress even under the straining teaching load. The best thing

about Christchurch was the students, who were a mixture of local Kiwis and Pacific Island scholarship students, all of whom were keen to learn and a joy to teach. But I still remember an intense disagreement with one class when I said in a lecture that British direct investment in New Zealand counted in the 'foreign investment' category. Almost to a student they shook their heads in disbelief and said 'Oh, No! British investments are *our own* investments, not foreign'. Australia had long recognised and counted British investment as a major source of foreign investment in the regular statistics since the immediate postwar years (and many critically informed commentators had often regarded it as foreign since before the Great Depression).

On returning to Australia I resumed the tutorship, before getting an offer of a continuing appointment as a lecturer in public policy at the relatively new and innovative Griffith University in Brisbane. Pat Weller had just been appointed professor in the new specialisation in public policy and had demanded two lecturing jobs to teach into the combined undergraduate program covering business studies and administration. Peter Coaldrake, the dean of the faculty and a public administration specialist, appointed Glyn Davis and myself to the two posts, and with Pat Weller as professor, we all immediately clicked and began decades of collaborative research. As our student numbers grew and we made research waves, we were fortunate to recruit Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh, then Peter Backhouse, Liz van Acker, Robyn Hollander, John Kane, Haig Patapan and Patrick Bishop. We also had close collegial links with Margaret Gardner, Brian Head, John Forster, Ross Homel, Jenny Fleming, John Warhurst, Peter Graham, Stephen Bell and Anne Tiernan. Much of our research work involved close collaboration with practitioners and public servants interested in explaining reform trajectories, analysing problems of policy and management, and managerial improvement. We also began to build an international network of co-researchers with whom we could collaborate and develop comparative projects – mainly through Pat's connections but then through the wider team's growing interactions. In this way, we began active collaboration with Rod Rhodes, RJ (Bob) Jackson, Peter Aucoin, Herman Bakvis, Lotte Jansen, Jouke de Vries, Rudi Anderweg, Evert Lindquist, Allen Schick, Fred Thompson, Hon Chan, Jun Ma and Tsai-Tsu Su. Also important to the team were the development of close relationships with important publishers such as John Iremonger, Patrick Gallagher, Peter Debus, Sue McGuinn, Jenny Curtis, John Elliot and Edward Elgar.

Three important developments occurred with public policy at Griffith over the next two decades. First, the emerging ‘Griffith Mafia’ (as we were once called) produced a number of leading teaching texts and case studies in public policy, which provided integrated books aimed at university courses that not only analysed the field but also assessed the most recent transformations and developments in thinking or practice. Textbooks came out almost on a production line basis within the school. Second, a large number of us, led by Pat Weller, were awarded a national priority fund grant from the Hawke Government, which allowed us to establish a national-level, externally funded multidisciplinary research centre called the Centre for Australian Public Sector Management (CAPSM). The centre held top-level biannual research workshops with analytical interaction between academics and practitioners. CAPSM produced around 20 research books through Macmillan and Allen & Unwin, a wide range of research occasional papers, reports to government and submissions. The centre was then expanded into the Key Centre for Law, Ethics, Justice and Governance, bringing in greater law ethics and criminology expertise – and later became the National Institute for Law, Ethics and Public Affairs. These centres helped boost Griffith’s social sciences credibility and standing. Third, the editorship of the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* was awarded to Glyn Davis and myself in 1995 (previously, Peter Coaldrake and others at Griffith had bid for the job, but Queensland was perhaps considered a little beyond the pale). This editorial diversification was one of the first times the institute’s professional and academic journal had moved away from the Government Department at the University of Sydney (although professors Roger Wettenhall and John Halligan, and briefly Roger Scott, had edited the journal for about seven years out of the University of Canberra until 1995). The editorship of the journal (which I undertook for almost 20 years) gave the CAPSM group an expanded horizon to engage with scholars in the field and with practitioners who were prepared to write about their experiences. We set about revamping the journal as an academic journal of standing that spoke to practitioners, and, perhaps more significantly, with the tremendous assistance of Rose Williams at Wiley, shifted it from a subsidised publication and made it very profitable for the institute within a few years.

My own research interests and collaborative relationships were developing into public management (with Pat Weller, Glyn Davis, Ciaran O’Faircheallaigh, Rod Rhodes and later Mike Keating and Andrew Podger); more particularly public budgeting (with Evert Lindquist, John

Forster, Joanne Kelly, Lotte Jensen, Jouke de Vries, Steve Bartos and Stein Helgeby), and continued interest in Australian politics and parliamentary studies (via Brian Galligan, Andrew Parkin, Stephen Bell, Tracey Arklay, John Uhr and Ian Marsh). To gain practical research knowledge and a much closer experience of the practitioners' coalface, I took a series of sabbaticals and research secondments, first in the Parliament of Queensland in 1995 where I teamed up with Tracey Arklay to write their postwar history at a gradual pace. Then with the Department of Finance and Administration, which accepted me as an academic in residence in 2000, with access to almost all their internal information about expenditure management. Finally, in 2010, I undertook research with the Australian Public Service Commission for a year part-time, working on strategic human resource management. I also did occasional research engagements with individual departments, writing teaching cases, undertaking conceptual work and providing reports and submissions.

Along with a few Griffith colleagues, I was involved from 2001 in the consultations to establish a national school of government, to focus on executive development in the public sector. In the negotiations, among the various jurisdictions to sponsor such a school, New Zealand had indicated a strong desire to be involved in the project. The resulting Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) was formally established in 2002 with five jurisdictions (later it encompassed all nine across Australasia), and commencing its ambitious education programs in 2003. I was appointed to The Australian National University (ANU) in late 2003 and took up the ANZSOG research chair on 1 July 2004, also becoming the national research director for the new school. I was the sole appointee at ANU with one administrative support staff member to help out, but had around 30–40 ANZSOG-related colleagues based mainly in Melbourne as well as in Wellington, Griffith University, the University of New South Wales, and later Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. Andrew Podger, who was APS Commissioner when ANZSOG was established, joined me at ANU in 2005, firstly as an adjunct professor and later as honorary professor of public policy. Andrew was an energetic collaborator and team player in our ANU centre, who together with me and a few of his colleagues made a considerable contribution to ANZSOG's research endeavours over many years.

ANZSOG was a real opportunity to engage with governments, politicians, government departments and individual practitioners. We ran hugely successful conferences for around 12 years, as well as a series of issue-related

workshops and roundtables, hosted public lectures in various capital cities, encouraged secondments and collaborations, and took on a handful of PhD students with ANZSOG-related interests. ANZSOG became a game changer, a Rolls Royce set of executive development programs that not only delivered state-of-the-art education programs to our member governments, but also set the standard of executive education in public management across the university sector (see Allen and Wanna 2016). Most importantly, in the ANU Press ANZSOG series of monograph publications we produced well over 50 titles over 14 years, on issues of crucial concern to practitioners and their respective organisations. Titles included: *Improving Implementation* (2007), *Putting Citizens First* (2013), *A Passion for Policy* (2007), *Collaborative Governance* (2008), *Dilemmas of Engagement* (2009), *Delivering Policy Reform* (2011), *Public Sector Governance in Australia* (2012), *Measuring and Promoting Wellbeing* (2014), *Social Cost-Benefit Analysis in Australia and New Zealand* (2016), *Sharpening the Sword of State* (2016), *Managing Under Austerity, Delivering Under Pressure* (2015), *Multi-Level Governance* (2017), *Australian Politics in a Digital Age* (2013), *The Three Sector Solution* (2016), *Value For Money* (2018), *Opening Government* (2018) and *Successful Public Policy* (2019) – to name a few.

Building research capacity across the ANZSOG network was a protracted process, not least because not all university teachers are actively engaged in research, and not all researchers are interested in applied research topics. Not all governments or departments were active in their demands for research and the timelines between the providers of research outputs and those seeking them were markedly dissimilar. Also, ANZSOG, out of necessity, operates from multidisciplinary perspectives that are essentially investigatory and problem-oriented, so it is not beholden to one academic discipline – it draws from public administration, political science, management and organisational theories, law, accounting, economics, psychology and even some business perspectives. Practitioners appreciated this breadth of insights and expertise, but sometimes it was hard to distil these approaches into coherent research projects across the network.

ANZSOG provided a convenient platform from which to explore public administration issues in other countries especially in our Asian region. Along with a group of colleagues, we formed the Greater China–Australia Dialogue on Public Administration in 2011 and have had 10 annual roundtables, with many of the papers presented at these events

subsequently published in journals or dedicated monographs. ANZSOG also became involved in training senior public sector officials in advanced leadership skills from Mainland China, Taiwan, India, Indonesia, Singapore and the Pacific Islands.

After a career in academe, I had produced 45 authored or edited books, 91 chapters in books, 89 articles, and 56 biannual political chronicles in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History (AJPA)*. In addition, I supervised 65 higher degree students in the completion of their theses across a very diverse range of topics and theoretical frameworks (see Appendix 2 at the end of this book). I was promoted to a full professorship in 1999 at the age of 45, and was elected to the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia in 2006. The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) appointed me as a National Fellow in 2011 and awarded me a Meritorious Service Award for editing their journal for nearly 20 years in 2014. Terry Moran, then president of IPAA stated in the letter conferring the award:

Your commitment to IPAA and the AJPA has been exemplary and your vision has been instrumental in making the AJPA a valuable and respected journal of record for developments in public administration. You have become the Boswell of Australia's Westminster System and thus an indelible influence on how public administrators see themselves and their work.

In 2019 I was appointed emeritus professor at both ANU and Griffith University and hold these positions to this day.

## References

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This text is taken from *Politics, Policy and Public Administration in Theory and Practice: Essays in Honour of Professor John Wanna*, edited by Andrew Podger, Michael de Percy and Sam Vincent, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.