

IN MEMORIAM PATRICK O'FARRELL

MALCOLM CAMPBELL

Patrick O'Farrell, Emeritus Scientia Professor of History at the University of New South Wales, passed away on Christmas Day 2003. His death at the age of seventy, mourned by family, colleagues, and generations of his students, marked the loss of one of Australia's best historians.

Patrick O'Farrell was born in Grey-mouth, New Zealand, in 1933. His family background and childhood experiences on the West Coast are described in one of his finest books, *Vanished Kingdoms*. Educated at the local Marist Brothers College, Patrick took degrees from the University of New Zealand at Canterbury before moving to Australia in 1956 to undertake his PhD at the Australian National University. An historian with a strong interest in labour history, Patrick was appointed to a lectureship in the School of History at the University of New South Wales in 1959, and he remained at that institution until his retirement.

Despite his lifelong interest in the history of labour, Patrick O'Farrell is best remembered for his seminal works on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, his internationally respected contributions to Irish history, and his path-breaking research on the Irish in Australia. In 1968 he published *The Catholic Church in Australia: A Short History 1788-1967*, a book that was revised and republished in 1977 as *The Catholic Church*

and Community in Australia: A History. A further edition was published in 1985. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s Patrick spent terms as a visiting professor at Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. His interest in Irish history resulted in two remarkably influential monographs on Ireland: *Ireland's English Question: Anglo-Irish Relations 1534-1970* (1971) and *England and Ireland Since 1800* (1975).

In 1977, Patrick suffered a stroke that left his right side paralysed. He recovered and with characteristic determination taught himself to write left-handed. After his recovery more books followed: *Letters from Irish Australia 1825-1929* (1987), the award-winning *The Irish in Australia* (1987), republished several times since, and *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand: A Personal Excursion* (1990). Patrick also wrote the history of his university *UNSW: A Portrait: The University of New South Wales 1949-1999* (1999). In June 2004 Patrick was a recipient of the Order of Australia.

My first encounter with Patrick was as a first-year student in 1981 when he gave a few lectures in the nineteenth-century Australian history course. I then enrolled for his course on the Irish in Australia as a third-year student. Patrick's course that semester was a wonderful example of research-based teaching and a model of why this nexus should be at the

heart of any university's mission. The lectures were memorable ones, based on pre-publication excerpts of *The Irish in Australia*, replete with the musings and dilemmas of the professional historian at work. The course also introduced me to Patrick's quirkier, more mischievous side when I was confronted with an examination question proposing that the entire course had been an extravagance, utilising sparse resources that could better have been devoted to doing something else. I thought it was bravely provocative and decided it was an obvious question to answer. Happily, I did well in the exam.

About this time I had been pondering enrolling for the Honours year in History and asked Patrick if he would be willing to supervise my dissertation. I soon realised I had made a good choice. Eschewing the feudalism fourth-year option, I also took his course on historiography, which was based on an idiosyncratic selection of texts including Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, Norman F. Dixon's *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, and the recent Australian 'oral history debate' in which Patrick himself had played a prominent role. Excited by newly-opened horizons I decided to undertake a PhD, a project Patrick supervised generously and rigorously but with characteristic candour along the way.

Patrick continued to work after his retirement: he once inquired saltily whether I imagined he now spent all his time sitting in the sun. I had no doubt that this was not, and never would be, the case. His attention was particularly committed to a project on sectarianism, a topic he had written about in previous works but had never received the sustained attention he felt it deserved. I believe he was therefore

pleased to be invited to speak at the Freilich Foundation's conference on religious bigotry, held in Canberra in December 2001. Unfortunately, a bout of ill-health prevented Patrick attending in person to deliver his paper.

In 'Double Jeopardy', Patrick O'Farrell explored in a new framework themes and issues which had arisen in his previous work on the Catholic Church and Irish Australians. As the paper shows, he was particularly concerned to historicise Australia's experience of sectarianism. The timing of European occupation of the continent, in between the American and French revolutions, cast the new society in a distinctive mould—'Australia emerges as the first post-American society, the first place where toleration was viewed as an operating principle rather than arrived at as a last-resort pragmatic necessity', he contends. The consequences were profound for Australia and its future. In the next two centuries Protestants and Roman Catholics in Australia engaged in a complex process, sometimes cooperatively, often maliciously, to establish a core-culture of tolerance. Patrick's paper suggests his deep concern that this common ground needed to be safeguarded from those unable or unwilling to subscribe to its values, not taken for granted.

As Patrick points out in this paper, he was sometimes typecast on account of his name by those who were poorly acquainted with him. In my experience he was intensely independent. Numerous examples could be cited of his censorious eye being cast over the behaviour of Australia's Irish, or the Catholic Church and its hierarchy, as well as their vociferous opponents. It is a fitting tribute that this volume, the product of a Freilich Founda-

tion conference on religious bigotry, includes this article in which the pre-eminent historian of the Catholic Church in Australia considers the origins and meaning of bigotry in the nation's experience.