

7. The Road to Conlon's Circus—and Beyond: A personal retrospective

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I was still a schoolboy when World War II broke out in September 1939. The son of a Presbyterian Minister in a small town to the north of Warrnambool, Victoria, I did most of my secondary schooling at Warrnambool High. After matriculating there, I went on to Geelong College to complete two years of 'Leaving Honours' as a preparation for university studies. From there, I had observed the Munich Agreement, the *Anschluss*, the Czechoslovakia crisis, the German–Soviet agreement of August 1939, and the German invasion of Poland, all leading up to the final outbreak of war. To an Australian schoolboy in his late teens, these events seemed to be essentially European affairs—indeed the war itself appeared almost as a continuation of World War I, and there seemed no reason why I should not embark, as planned, on a university course.

I enrolled at the University of Melbourne in what, in retrospect, seem the golden days of R. M. Crawford's School of History.¹ The emphasis was largely on European and British history: Crawford's modern history course dealing especially with the Renaissance and Reformation, Kathleen Fitzpatrick's course on Tudors and Stuarts, the Civil War, and the Protectorate and the Restoration, and Jessie Webb's ancient history course. This perspective followed naturally from the courses offered in Victorian secondary schooling of the day, leading on to university studies. There too we had studied British history from 1066 to 1914, European history from 1453 to 1848, and accompanying courses in English literature (including four or five plays of Shakespeare between years 9 and 11), English poetry from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and a foreign language—usually French or German. The result was a firmly Eurocentric view of the past, with Britain and Europe at the centre and Australia and the other dominions very much on the imperial periphery. But the central feature of Crawford's school was less the choice of periods for study than his underlying concern, in all courses, with process and theory.

It was his view that, as scientific explanation depended on underlying natural laws, so historians might discover laws of human behaviour and historical processes, and history might become a science.² There were obvious links here

1 Fay Anderson, *A Historian's Life: Max Crawford and the politics of academic freedom* (Melbourne, 2005).

2 This view was later developed in R. M. Crawford, 'History as a Science', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 3:11 (1947), pp. 153–75. The issues involved were canvassed by other writers: Carl Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 39:2 (1942), pp. 35–48; Patrick Gardiner,

with Marxist theory—economic causation, class struggle and the dialectical process towards the ultimate classless society—and in the early 1940s the left wing of the Labour Club and the University Branch of the Australian Communist Party made their own contribution to the arguments of the day.

Over the years these questions formed a matter of continuing debate and criticism. In particular, it was argued that though, formally speaking, historical explanation implied covering law, this did not mean that history bore any close relation to, say, physics or chemistry. The so-called laws were either trivial, or so obvious as to not require explication. They required so many ‘fillers’ to make them valid that they might be described as laws with only a single case, and therefore were not really laws at all. For these reasons, however logically valid the idea of ‘covering laws’ might be, they had little bearing on the actual nature of historical inquiry.³ In later years, Crawford himself withdrew from the confidence of his earlier views.⁴

Crawford’s teaching in the early 1940s interacted with philosophy as taught by George Paul. Paul had been a student in Cambridge of Ludwig Wittgenstein and his teaching in Melbourne challenged many of the received views of his colleagues and their students about appearance and reality. His History of Philosophy course was delivered to an audience of maybe 40 or 50, of whom only a small handful was formally enrolled in the subject. The others were students, and also staff, from other disciplines who found in these lectures a critical framework within which their respective disciplines could be set. For historians, Paul’s analysis of some of Crawford’s theoretical certainties enlivened undergraduate discussion of the central tenets of departmental doctrine, and contributed to Crawford’s ultimate rethinking of his earlier position.

In the meantime, Australia’s wartime involvement moved on and began to impinge even on the sheltered groves of academe. In my second year—in 1941—students were enrolled in the Melbourne University Rifles (MUR), a militia unit that had, I think, weekly parades in preparation for a training camp scheduled for the 1941–42 vacation. We entered camp—at Bonegilla, Victoria, near Wodonga—on 8 December 1941. This was the day of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. As we gathered that morning on Spencer Street Station, news

The Nature of Historical Explanation (Oxford, 1952). For a further brief discussion of these views in Crawford’s department, see J. D. Legge, ‘Chance and Circumstance: A gradual journey towards Asian studies’, in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *Historians and Their Discipline: The call of Southeast Asian history* (Kuala Lumpur, 2007), pp. 55–71.

3 For example, W. H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1960); Douglas Gasking, ‘The Historian’s Craft and Scientific History’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 4:14 (1950), pp. 112–24.

4 R. M. Crawford, ‘The School of Prudence or Inaccuracy and Incoherence in Describing Chaos’, *Historical Studies*, 15:57 (1971), pp. 27–42.

of Pearl Harbor spread through the ranks and we realised that the war had entered a new phase. The assumption was that we would now be in the Army for the duration.

There followed three months of intensive infantry training: weapons drill, long marches, night bivouacs and the rest. (Perhaps the most useful contribution we made to the actual war effort was being called on occasion to the Albury Railway Station where there was then a break of gauge between the Victorian railway system with its broad gauge and the NSW system with its standard gauge. Our task was to carry ammunition across the platform and load it on to the NSW carrier.)

At the end of three months, the members of the MUR were dispersed to a variety of operational units. My posting was to an anti-aircraft battalion, and I went into training at Braybrook where I learned to load and fire a 3.7-inch anti-aircraft gun—quite an experience in itself. I was also one of the people who saw an unexpected and unusual plane—a float plane—emerge from the clouds for a couple of moments and then disappear into them again. Nobody—even our experienced teachers—could recognise it as one of ours, and the conclusion was that it was, in fact, a Japanese plane operating perhaps from a naval ship or a submarine somewhere off the Victorian coast.⁵

After this training, I was expecting to be posted to New Guinea, Darwin or somewhere else. Before this happened, I was called in by my commanding officer and told (rather scornfully, I think) that I had been nominated as a 'reserved student'. Reserved students were a small number who were exempted from service in order to complete their university courses. This was a policy designed to keep arts faculties in operation. I took a day's leave in order to visit the university and discuss the matter with Crawford, after which I decided to refuse the nomination and remain with my unit. A little later, however, I was again summoned by the CO and informed that the choice was not mine. I was to be drafted back to the university. So I was discharged, and, having at least done what seemed to be the proper thing by electing to remain in the Army, I was happy enough with the outcome.

The year 1942 was an interesting one to be a student. One tackled the demands of the final honours year in the company of a smaller student body, composed essentially of other reserved students, together with a number of close friends who were conscientious objectors awaiting their appearance before the tribunal

5 This might indeed have been the case. See the Travel Section of *The Weekend Australian*, 11–12 June 2005, for an article by Nicholas Shakespeare about the east coast of Tasmania. It recounts how a collapsible float plane operated from a submarine moored there in 1942. The date of March 1942 is about right. This might have been the plane seen from Braybrook.

that would consider their case for registration as objectors. (In the end, they were all able to continue with their studies.) Intellectual exchanges were intense and lasting friendships were made.

Final exams came and after the results were announced it was a matter of contemplating my next step. At this point, Max Crawford called me and told me he had been asked to nominate appropriate new graduates for an Army Research Section at Victoria Barracks. Would I go for an interview? I did and was appointed and, though I did not understand it at the time, entered a new phase of my educational process.

What was this Research Section (and later, more grandly, a Directorate)? An esoteric unit. It was vaguely known, within the Army, to be there but no-one quite knew what it did—including, it was said, those who were in it. That shadowy reputation remained even after the war. It was not in any sense an intelligence outfit as some thought, but was engaged in a wide variety of non-military inquiries of which more below. But essentially—at least initially—it was a base for the multifarious activities of its Commanding Officer, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel) Alfred Conlon, known to all and sundry, including even his most junior subordinates, simply as Alf.⁶

Alf, stocky, crew cut, pipe smoking, was a familiar and perhaps conspiratorial figure in the corridors of power—that is, the back corridors. Pushing a particular barrow here, arguing a case there, managing to worm his way into the confidence of important people—politicians, bureaucrats, generals—and able to persuade them of the importance of proposals he had to make. He was thought to exercise great power and influence—sometimes correctly, sometimes not. One example was his ability to persuade the Prime Minister, John Curtin, of the need for a special committee to consider questions of national morale. Such a committee—the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale—was indeed established. It included a number of senior academic figures, including Professor Julius Stone, Professor of Law at Sydney University, Professor R. D. (Pansy) Wright, Professor of Physiology at Melbourne University, and others. In fact, this particular initiative had a fairly short life and had little impact.

One of Alf's characteristics was his attitude to bureaucratic forms and procedures. He loved cutting through red tape and bureaucratic nonsense, partly because it got in the way of things he wanted to do and partly for the sheer enjoyment of doing it, even when it was totally unnecessary. The account given by Peter Ryan of his being plucked from the Leave and Transit Depot at Caulfield Racecourse⁷ almost exactly paralleled my own experience in 1943. When appointed to the

6 For a lively portrait of Alf, see Peter Ryan, *Brief Lives* (Sydney, 2004), pp. 28–61; also John Thompson (ed.), *Alfred Conlon: A memorial by some of his friends* (Sydney, 1963).

7 Ryan, *Brief Lives*, p. 40.

Research Section, I had to go the LTD at Royal Park to be processed. Having been in the Army already, my papers had to be collected from wherever they were. This took some days and it was clear that my arrival at the section would be delayed. I rang Alf to inform him of the fact. He instructed me to have myself paraded before the CO. I said surely that was not necessary. It would not matter if I was a bit late. He said just do it. So to the Sergeant Major, who strongly resisted my request. I insisted, so he marched me angrily to the CO's door and said, 'I've got this man, Legge, here who insists on being paraded'. The CO was just putting down his phone and said, 'Ah, yes, I've just had a call about him from Victoria Barracks. He's to be out of here in half an hour. Just see to it, Sergeant Major.'

How did Alf achieve the rank of major and become head of the Research Section? Largely, it would seem, by a series of stops and starts. A Sydney man, born in 1908, he became a student at Fort Street High School, but dropped out before matriculating. He completed matriculation a little later by private study and went on to the University of Sydney. He completed an arts degree in 1931 and, like others of his generation, he was much influenced by John Anderson, the Challis Professor of Philosophy.⁸ He then started medicine but dropped out after first year and began law. He came back to medicine in 1937 and completed second and third years before again dropping out. In fact, he did not complete the medical degree until after the war, graduating MB.BS in 1951—20 years after his initial enrolment at the University of Sydney. In 1939, he managed to become an undergraduate representative on the University Senate and in 1940–41 became Manpower Officer of the university.

It was in the latter capacity that he met the Adjutant-General, Brigadier General V. H. Stantke. Alf persuaded Stantke that the Army needed some kind of think tank to advise on non-military matters: civil affairs, postwar planning, and so on. Such a unit would provide a place to locate odd bodies—civilian types whom the Army wished to use in a specialist capacity: anthropologists in the Northern Territory to smooth Aboriginal contacts, agricultural scientists in New Guinea. Stantke was persuaded and the Research Section was established in the Adjutant-General's Department.

In my early weeks in the section, I was not at all sure what I was supposed to be doing. Alf would put me on to preparing short papers on matters on which he wanted to be informed, but there was not much system about that, at least at first. One such task was an investigation of German administration of north-eastern New Guinea before World War I. Another was a similar study of Australian administration in prewar Papua. (The latter in fact became rather more than a short paper and in due course was submitted for an MA at the

⁸ Brian Kennedy, *A Passion to Oppose: John Anderson, philosopher* (Melbourne, 1995).

University of Melbourne. I continued to work on this after the war and, after extensive revision, it was eventually published.⁹ I am not sure that Alf ever read any of these little essays. He asked for them often on the spur of the moment. By the time I had written something, his interests had shifted to other things.

Shortly after my arrival in the section, General Stantke was transferred to the position of Commander of the Third Military District (Queensland) and was succeeded as Adjutant-General by Brigadier C. E. M. Lloyd. Lloyd knew he had this peculiar outfit under his immediate command, but did not like it or its commanding officer. He knew, however, that Alf had political friends in Canberra, including perhaps Prime Minister Curtin and therefore hesitated to dissolve us. He made a visitation to the section and went round asking each member of staff what he did—in some cases, a rather embarrassing question, given the context of the inquiry. As a mere private, I escaped interrogation. I believe Lloyd could have closed us down by a stroke of his pen, but he spared us that. He did the next best thing: he left us without anything to do.

So it was for some time, until Alf's next move. In typical fashion, he managed to sell himself to the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Thomas Blamey, as he had once sold himself to Stantke. I remember Alf bustling into the office on the day this was finally arranged and, on bumping into me, saying, 'Well, John, we've had our orgasm'. From then on, we did have things to do of a wide variety of kinds: anything the Commander-in-Chief wanted information on. And in general Alf's knowledge of the Canberra political scene was of use to Blamey, who was not in touch with that world. The pair clearly entered into a close relationship, which lasted until the end of the war.

Our status changed. From having been a 'section', we were now a 'directorate' and later the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA). And amongst the various matters on which Alf gave advice, our major and continuing cluster of functions came to concern New Guinea. It was for this purpose that we acquired the anthropologists, economists, educationalists and others whose expertise was necessary to what became a major enterprise in postwar planning.

They were a remarkable array of people. They included one future Governor-General (John Kerr), one future Ambassador to Moscow, Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Governor of Tasmania (Jim Plimsoll), Australia's most distinguished librarian (Ida Leeson),¹⁰ one of Australia's leading poets (James McAuley; and also Harold Stewart), a number of anthropologists (Camilla Wedgwood and Ian

9 J. D. Legge, *Australian Colonial Policy: A survey of native administration and European development in Papua* (Sydney, 1956) was published under the auspices of the Australian Institute of International Affairs.

10 Sylvia Martin, *Ida Leeson: A life* (Sydney, 2006).

Hogbin, both former students of Malinowski), a geographer (future founding Professor of Geography at the University of Melbourne, John Andrews), and a future Director of Melbourne University Press (Peter Ryan).

Some of these deserve further comment. Peter Ryan was a special case. He arrived in the directorate as a young warrant officer in 1944, having come directly from New Guinea where he had been cut off beyond enemy lines in the Huon Peninsula. He was one of a small group who had managed to survive, learn Pidgin, and build up a network of communication amongst the indigenous people. They had been, in effect, patrol officers sometimes in isolation from each other over quite a considerable area.¹¹ This experience was to be of direct relevance to the work of the directorate over the next few years.

McAuley and Stewart might also seem to be unusual recruits. What were they doing in an outfit of this kind? It was not that the Army needed poets, though it was sometimes suggested amongst the directorate's rank and file that if a cultivated society was what we were fighting for, poets should be prevented from being killed in the process. More seriously, Alf recognised McAuley's exceptional intellectual powers and in due course he did turn his mind to the serious study of New Guinea and became a recognised authority on colonial administration. Before then, of course, he and Stewart organised the famous Ern Malley hoax.¹² The Ern Malley poems were written in the directorate and sent off to Max Harris, editor of the literary journal *Angry Penguins*. They were intended to be meaningless and were constructed by choosing words at random, putting in irrelevant lines from a report on mosquito control, and constantly interrupting each other so that there could be no possibility of unconscious meaning. The intention had been to discover whether the members of the literary movement to which Harris belonged could distinguish between genuine poems and meaningless ones. Harris was taken in, but it could nevertheless be argued that the poems were not as meaningless as their authors claimed. It was reported that George Paul saw them as a hoax but attributed them to 'a' student of John Anderson. There were, in fact, two students but the pair was so much in tune with each other that there could have been more unity than they pretended.

From 1943, New Guinea remained the directorate's main preoccupation. Before the war, Australian New Guinea (the eastern part of the island) consisted of two territories: the Territory of New Guinea, administered by Australia under mandate from the League of Nations, and the Territory of Papua, covering the

11 See his account of that experience in his book: Peter Ryan, *Fear Drive My Feet* (Sydney, 1959).

12 Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair* (St Lucia, Qld, 1993).

south-eastern part of the island. The former was a German colony before World War I.¹³ The latter, formerly a British Protectorate, had been passed over to Australia in 1906.

During World War II, the two administrations were brought under military control and were governed by a special unit: the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) under the command of Major-General B. Morris. Clearly, this involved a mass of complex and intricate issues and the need for a major non-military, or at least non-operational, input. Here lay the role of the directorate, advising the Army and also the Government about administrative matters. It became, in effect, the liaison body between ANGAU and the Department of External Territories in matters relating to the government of the combined territories. It was involved also at both ends of that liaison in considering the possible direction of postwar policies in New Guinea and in the South-West Pacific in general, and in maintaining contact with E. J. (Eddie) Ward, Minister of External Territories, and with the department.

The specific issues on which the directorate focused included the question of whether the wartime union of the two territories should be continued after the war; the codification of the laws of the new united administration; the question of whether indentured labour, on which the existing plantation system depended, should be abolished; future agricultural policy—cash cropping by the indigenous population, cooperatives, agricultural extension; and the health and education of a native elite. In short, the whole complex of what, in evolving British thinking, was called a development and welfare policy. Included in all this was the possibility of a future transition to independence, though in the context of contemporary thinking, that seemed to be a very long-term matter. Some of these issues were very contentious. The question of indentured labour was one of these. Planters looked with anger at proposals to abolish it, or at least to remove the penal sanction that gave force to contracts with native labourers. To the planter community, these proposals were seen as likely to stand in the way of future development.

In addition to engaging in research on various aspects of future policy, the directorate was made responsible for preparing and then establishing a school for the training of servicemen for appointment as patrol officers under ANGAU. This was done with an eye to the creation of a new territorial administration after the war. It was hoped that some of those who volunteered for training at the school would elect to stay on after the war. Some of them did, though most

13 Stewart Firth, *New Guinea under the Germans* (Melbourne, 1982); Charles Rowley, *The Australians in German New Guinea, 1914–1921* (Melbourne, 1958).

were keen to get back to civilian life as soon as the war ended. But it was also intended that the school would continue to exist after the war, to train members of a future reconstructed administrative service.

From then on, my own work lay within the directorate's New Guinea enterprise. In 1944 I transferred to the Australian Infantry Force (AIF) and was posted to New Guinea to serve in ANGAU. Based at Popondetta and Kokoda, I was able to travel in the surrounding area. (Having been involved in a study of prewar administration, this was a kind of continuing fieldwork.) Then, when the School of Civil Affairs opened in Canberra in 1945, I was commissioned and became one of its more junior staff members.

The school was located in some huts in the grounds of the Royal Military College (Duntroon). Duntroon was a somewhat terrifying neighbour—or landlord—for such a way-out institution as ours. We were always very conscious of this elite military college looking, as it were, over our shoulders at this very un-military batch of academics in uniform. But we managed to survive their scrutiny. New staff were added to our existing list. Colonel J. K. Murray (formerly Professor of Agriculture at the University of Queensland) was appointed as Commanding Officer (Chief Instructor, to give his proper title). Ralph Piddington, as second-in-command, joined Wedgwood and Hogbin as an additional anthropologist. Lucy Mair, Reader in Colonial Administration at the London School of Economics (LSE), was brought over from England to provide a different source of expertise. Ted Strehlow, son of a German missionary at Hermannsburg Mission in the Northern Territory and also, we understood, a member of the Arrernte people, filled a gap in our anthropological knowledge. Perhaps the most unusual appointment was that of a philosopher, Douglas Gasking—another student of Wittgenstein—to teach scientific method. We also imported two former members of the administrative staff of the territories, Jim Taylor and Jack McKenna, who provided a practical dimension. And Ida Leeson continued to lay the foundations of a relevant library.

The school was intended not merely to meet the immediate demand for territorial administrative officers but as part of a reshaping of the prewar system. As such it aimed to give a radically changed course of training for those entering the service. Before the war, recruits were given a preliminary period in the field and were then brought back to the University of Sydney where they were given a brief course in anthropology. But for the most part they learned on the job, and in so doing they tended to acquire the conservative outlook of the old territory hands. In contrast, the school sought to provide a broader educational experience that would give them a framework into which their practical experience could be fitted, and that would include long-term perceptions of administrative policy.

So, some imperial history, including late-nineteenth-century imperialism, the partition of Africa, and competing principles of what was then called ‘native administration’ (themes developed by Lucy Mair), plus some anthropology—not merely as an introduction to New Guinea societies as the Sydney course did, but setting that in the context of broader anthropological theory—plus some elementary legal training since the patrol officers would be magistrates. And Gasking’s scientific method course was in effect an introduction to philosophy, which did capture the interest of the brighter students.

It was a grand—if not grandiose—plan, and it was intended as a new start. The Sydney University Anthropology Department was not a party to the planning for the school but was simply ignored—a fact that was humiliating for its head, Professor A. P. Elkin.¹⁴ It was clearly exciting for the students who had been specially selected and who were taught, university style, by lectures and tutorials. It was also an exciting experience for staff, who felt that they were participating in an important and innovative enterprise. And for me, it launched me into the field of imperial history en route to the study of the Western Pacific and then South-East Asia. Intellectually, I enjoyed the stimulus of the (for me) new discipline of social anthropology and the introduction to social theory of a kind that I had not had in the Melbourne School of History.

The education of these embryonic patrol officers was seen as part of a dramatic departure in postwar policy towards New Guinea, which in turn reflected new perceptions of Australia’s possible future role in the region as a whole. Alf and other senior members of the directorate had a warm rapport with the Minister for External Territories, Eddie Ward. In July 1945, Ward made a policy statement in his Second Reading speech to the House of Representatives on the PNG Provisional Administration Bill, setting out the broad lines of a new policy of development ‘having regard to the moral and material welfare of the native inhabitants’. This ‘new deal’ for New Guinea, as it came to be called, was based on the principle of trusteeship, which replaced the League of Nations term—mandates—in all discussions of the government of dependent territories.

In my earlier study of prewar Australian administration of Papua, my emphasis had been on a perception of a continuing tension between European development based on a plantation system on the one hand, and welfare policies (health, education, agricultural extension) for the subject population on the other. Prewar administrators—Sir William MacGregor and Sir Hubert Murray¹⁵—were seen by me as having managed to moderate this tension and to have been more sensitive to the need to protect the native population than were their

14 Geoffrey Gray, ‘“I was not consulted”: A. P. Elkin, Papua New Guinea and the politics of anthropology’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 40:2 (1994), pp. 195–213.

15 R. B. Joyce, *Sir William MacGregor* (Melbourne, 1971); Francis West, *Hubert Murray: The Australian Pro-Consul* (Melbourne, 1968).

counterparts in the neighbouring mandated Territory of New Guinea. Ward's speech (which certainly reflected the views of the directorate) addressed some of these questions.

The speech foreshadowed the continuance of what had already happened during the war: the creation of a single administration of the two territories, which were to become the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The existing plantation system would remain, but with important changes to the indentured labour system that sustained it. The central feature of that system was the penal sanction imposed for breaches of contract—a feature that had a sniff of slavery about it. Ward's speech envisaged the abolition of the system within five years. As already indicated, this aroused great opposition amongst the planter community, which complained that policy was being influenced by 'long-haired anthropologists'—no doubt a reference to the school. In addition, extra funds were to be made available to enable a greater provision of educational facilities, medical services and support for native agriculture. Behind this thinking was the idea that Papua New Guinea would gradually move towards independence though, even in the directorate, it was not thought that this could come about in the near future.

And shortly after this speech, the Chief Instructor of the school, Colonel J. K. Murray, was appointed as the Administrator of the combined territories, which seemed an earnest indication of the influence of the directorate in planning postwar policy. Murray, too, had developed a good relationship with Ward—possibly an unlikely rapport, given Murray's stern military bearing and Ward's tougher, more larrikin style! But there it was. Undoubtedly, Murray saw himself as specifically selected to implement the new deal. And so, more or less, it came about. Policy changes formed a foundation for ultimate independence some 30 years later.

It remains a question, however, how far the directorate really could take credit for this. Its period of influence was not to last. The defeat of Japan meant that the Army had less time to prepare for the implementation of its new policies, and responsibility for these reverted to the department. When Blamey stepped down at the end of 1945, Alf's power base was gone, and officers of the department—perhaps more conservatively inclined—began to reassert their influence. And Ward himself appeared to lose interest as he was caught up in the pressures of postwar politics. The school continued. It moved to Sydney to quarters at Middle Head, and became the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA)—a civilian organisation that carried on with the task of educating PNG administrative staff. Many of the wartime staff began to disperse, going back to prewar occupations or to new jobs. McAuley stayed on for some time and so did Ida Leeson. Before the move from Canberra, I had been offered, and accepted, a lectureship in history at the University of Western

Australia. And new appointments were made. John Kerr stayed for a while as Principal in succession to Murray, and later that job went to Charles Rowley. Alf—desperately seeking a new power base—hoped that the school would become part of The Australian National University (ANU), which was about to be formed, and that its responsibility would extend to a role in the newly formed South Pacific Commission, but that was not to be.

For all that there is no doubt that the role of the directorate and the school had been considerable. Lucy Mair, having been brought from the LSE to teach in the school, observed in her subsequent study, *Australia in New Guinea* (1948), that it was no secret that many of the initiatives shaping future policy came from the directorate—a view echoed later by Brian Jinks, who, in a 1983 article, allowed that the directorate had created a climate of reform of a kind that had simply not been there before, and its ideas had acquired a momentum that enabled them to carry on after the war.¹⁶ When a Liberal Government succeeded Labor in 1949, new ministers broadly accepted policies that had been hammered out during the war.

The most distinguished of these, Paul Hasluck (1951–63), would not have admitted that. In his account of his work as Minister for Territories, he mentioned the work of the directorate in a dismissive footnote, and, in the same work, he spoke contemptuously of ‘a circle of confident people’ at the school ‘who were glowing with ideas about the proper way to administer the Territory and how to shape the world’.¹⁷ He referred to J. K. Murray as ‘a tired and disappointed man’ who believed that he had been chosen by Ward ‘to inaugurate and carry out vigorously an enlightened policy’. He also referred to the ‘Ward–Murray policy’ and spoke of Murray’s ‘misgivings about anything that came from Canberra’.

Certainly, Hasluck did not get on with Murray. He spoke of him as a ‘good and devoted man’ but found him uncooperative. For his part, Murray appeared stiff in manner and was suspicious, no doubt, that Hasluck would be in the hands of departmental officers and might betray the Conlon vision. Be that as it may, Murray was removed after a year and replaced with Donald Cleland, who had also had wartime experience in New Guinea as head of the Production Control Board, but who had not been part of the directorate’s range of influence.

Much of this was made clear in Hasluck’s account of his work as minister in *A Time for Building*. And he takes credit for laying the foundations of the new Papua New Guinea. He did deserve much of that. He was an able and scholarly person who already had an interest in the administering of indigenous people—

16 L. P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (Melbourne, 1948), pp. 19–23; Brian Jinks, ‘A. A. Conlon, the Directorate of Research and New Guinea’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 12 (1983), pp. 21–33.

17 Paul Hasluck, *A Time for Building: Australian administration in Papua and New Guinea, 1951–1963* (Melbourne, 1976), pp. 38, 15, respectively.

demonstrated in his study of Aboriginal policy in Western Australia, *Black Australians*. And he did propel Papua New Guinea a considerable distance along the road to eventual independence. At the same time, he had faults of his own. I was to get to know him well in the late 1940s when I was Lecturer in History at the University of Western Australia. After Hasluck had fallen out with External Affairs Minister, H. V. Evatt, and resigned from the department, Fred Alexander, Professor of History, managed to get Paul a readership in the department so that he could work on the volume he had been assigned to write in the official war history. For that period, we were close colleagues. We got on well together but I felt he had some odd limitations. He had a streak of arrogance and considerable intellectual stubbornness. His intellectual powers were not always matched by receptivity to alternative ideas. These characteristics, in my view, might be seen in his handling of the directorate in *A Time for Building*. It is my assessment that he was less than fair in his judgments about the directorate and the school.

But at the end of the war, and with the transfer of the school to Sydney, these arguments lay in the future. For me, my participation ended in 1945 with my move to Perth. Nevertheless, the influence of the directorate and the school over the previous three years remained. The experience had turned my attention away from the preoccupations of my undergraduate days and directed them rather to Western Pacific history. As a lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Western Australia, I found myself teaching a broad survey course on East and South-East Asia, and another on Australian history, but at the same time I was beginning to revise the work on the prewar administration of Papua. That was not finished until the early 1950s, but when, in 1948, I was the recipient of an ANU scholarship, I continued to work on other aspects of Western Pacific history in Oxford.

The ANU at that time was just coming into existence. There were to be no undergraduates. It was to be a graduate institution with, initially, four research schools: Medicine, Physics, Social Sciences and Pacific Studies. The Interim Council established the new scholarships in 1948 in order to provide a small body of graduate students in advance of the completion of the initial buildings, the appointment of academic staff and the recruitment of graduate students to study in Canberra. The Interim Council had also formed a committee in England of senior academic advisors to assist in the planning of the research schools. Two of these were Raymond Firth (Pacific Studies) and W. K. Hancock (Social Sciences). Hancock was Professor of Economic History at Oxford, and it was he to whom I reported on my arrival. He took me for a long walk across Port Meadow to Wytham and back, in the course of which I indicated the kind of study I had in mind. My plan was to focus on changes in British policy in the mid-nineteenth century, taking Fiji as a case study, using the Colonial Office records available in the Public Records Office, and examining especially the

work of Sir Arthur Gordon, first Governor of Fiji after its cession to Britain. At the end of our walk, Hancock said, as he bade me farewell at his front door, ‘Well, one thing is clear. You’ve come to the wrong place. You ought to be at Cambridge with [Jim] Davidson’, who at the time was a Fellow of St John’s College and University Lecturer in Colonial Studies.

It was a bit late for that. I, of course, knew of Jim Davidson—shortly to take up the Chair of Pacific History at the ANU—and had already planned to get in touch with him. Thereafter we met occasionally and he was a kind of unofficial supervisor. My official supervisor, V. T. Harlow, was a Caribbean historian with only a slight interest in the Pacific, but he was a firm critic of whatever I wrote. And there were others at Oxford who had an interest in my subject: A. F. Madden, of Rhodes House, E. T. (Bill) Williams, later Warden of Rhodes House, not to mention, amongst the student body, Fijian student Ratu Kamisese Mara, later to become his country’s Prime Minister (and later President) after independence. And in London, Sir Arthur Gordon’s son, Lord Stanmore, who made available his father’s correspondence from his Fijian days.

In embarking on this topic, I was taking some of the African themes that had been developed by Lucy Mair at the School of Civil Affairs: Lord Lugard and his ideas of indirect rule in Nigeria, later notions of a development and welfare policy for colonial peoples, and so forth. In effect, I was taking these ideas back in time and using them as a framework for the study of Fiji. The thesis was eventually completed, after a resubmission, and was published as *Britain in Fiji, 1858–1880* (1958). On my return to Perth in 1951, it was my intention to pursue Western Pacific issues further. I had in mind a study of alternative missionary preconceptions in different territories; however, the main centre for such work in Australia was the ANU—a long way from Western Australia. There was a possibility for a time that there might be an opening in Jim Davidson’s Department of Pacific History. This did not eventuate, however, and in 1954 I made a sharp decision to change course, and to switch my focus from the Pacific to South-East Asia. I began to learn Indonesian, and then, in 1956, with the aid of a Carnegie Fellowship, I made my way to Cornell University for a semester, followed by my first spell of fieldwork in Indonesia.¹⁸

Thereafter it was South-East Asia rather than the Pacific, but no doubt with intellectual influences carried over from the directorate and the Australian School of Pacific Administration.

18 For an account of that, see Legge, ‘Chance and Circumstance’, pp. 55–71.