

# Vale: Stuart Macintyre, 1947-2021

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The passing of Stuart Macintyre, Emeritus Professor in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne and one of Australia's most prominent historians, was a moment of shock and sadness for those—friends and family, students, historians and colleagues—whose lives he touched. I count myself fortunate to have been just one of those many.

Stuart was educated at Scotch College and took his first degree at Melbourne University, before completing a Master of Arts at Monash and his DPhil at Cambridge under the supervision of Henry Pelling. Returning to Australia in 1979, he spent a brief period lecturing at Murdoch University, then came to the Melbourne history department, with which he retained a close association for the rest of his career. In 1991, he was promoted to the Ernest Scott Chair of History, and from 1999 to 2006 he served as Dean of Arts. Stuart sat on many organisational boards and councils, including terms as presidents of the Australian Historical Association (1996–98), and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (2006–9). From 2008 he also played a key role in developing the Australian Curriculum. In 2011 he was honoured as an Officer of the Order of Australia.

Although Stuart was sometimes described as a labour historian, no subdisciplinary label was ever capacious enough to contain his interests. His first two monographs, *A Proletarian Science* and *Little Moscows* (both 1980), were studies of British Marxism that grew out of his Cambridge DPhil. From there his interests turned mainly to Australian topics. He wrote general histories of Australia, and histories of colonial liberalism, social justice, civil liberties, the Communist Party of Australia, the University of Melbourne, higher education, the social sciences, historians, historiography and the history wars. He frequently co-authored, often with current or former graduate students, collaborations that could make academic careers. He will likely be best remembered for *Australia's Boldest Experiment* (2015), his masterful account of postwar reconstruction, the work of an experienced historian in full command of the power of synthesis. He once told me, as the manuscript was nearing completion, that it was the project about which he was most passionate. Stuart's final book was *The Party* (2022), the second volume of his history of the Communist Party, following on from *The Reds* (1998). Sadly he did not get to see it published, but he worked on it right until the end, finalising the manuscript in his last weeks.

I came to know Stuart in the first years of his retirement, when he was still teaching the history honours subject *The Writing of Australian History*. The subject was a minor passion of Stuart's that he chose to keep teaching long after retiring from most other academic duties. It was my introduction to the nationalist histories of Brian Fitzpatrick, to the historiographical de- 7

bates over the memorialisation of Anzac, to questions of historical fictionalisation through the work of novelist Kate Grenville, and to the virtuoso tricksiness of Greg Denning's Performances (at the time something of a personal revelation). Stuart marked my honours thesis in a characteristically generous but probing spirit, and I subsequently published a version of it at his suggestion—a welcome and entirely unexpected encouragement. It was that early vote of confidence that led me to a PhD under Stuart's supervision. No doubt many others were similarly spurred on by his support. Most of my memories of him are in the lounge at University House where—Stuart no longer having an office on campus—we would meet fortnightly and discuss my project over black coffee. We shared more cups of coffee in those years than I could possibly count.

In the many tributes that have flowed for Stuart since his passing in November 2021, others have highlighted traits and qualities that I likewise recognise. He had an eye for the telling detail, and a wry knack for words. He urged students to read widely, beyond their specialisms, insisting that breadth of knowledge would set them in good stead in their careers. I vividly recall him once explaining how his not having been trained in Australian history informed his insights into it—when he read into it, he said, distance from the topic allowed him to see and question assumptions otherwise taken for granted.

Above all, there was Stuart's generosity as a teacher, supervisor, and public intellectual, and the prodigious energy he brought to the work of historical scholarship. Stuart always sought to bring others into the historical conversation, never to gatekeep. For a scholar of his stature, he wore his substantial authority lightly. He always had time to give. Stuart's passion and energy for his work were famous among those who knew him well. Drafts sent to him to read would be returned with comments at dizzying speeds, often first thing the next morning (and often with his notorious 'Ugh!' against a phrase or sentence that deserved it). Far from seeing retirement as a time to slow down, he took it as an opportunity to pursue research interests that had been limited by the administrative commitments of his later academic career. Both *Australia's Boldest Experiment* and *The Party* were fruits of these last years of productivity. Much that he still wanted to do was left undone. We are all poorer for Stuart's being gone too soon, but richer for having had the benefit of his optimism, vision, and generosity.