

**STUART MACINTYRE, LENORE LAYMAN  
& JENNY GREGORY (EDITORS):**

*A HISTORIAN FOR ALL SEASONS:*

*ESSAYS FOR GEOFFREY BOLTON*

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When considering eminent and renowned Australian historians of the last sixty years, Geoffrey Bolton (1931-2015) will doubtlessly feature at the forefront of the minds of a broad spectrum of Australians. His significance extends past his written work, from his advocacy in Britain in establishing the Australian Studies Centre (now the Menzies Centre), to his role in the formative days of Murdoch University. Bolton is a historian that in addition to his role within academia maintained a public role outside of the academy, typified by his being named West Australian of the year in 2006. Bolton's impact in his professional field is illustrated by the throng of former colleagues he encountered throughout his career in history who have collaborated to create this collection of essays.

*A Historian for All Seasons: Essays for Geoffrey Bolton* provides a fitting tribute to a figure who made an immense contribution to the intellectual life of Australia. Instead of merely summarising Bolton's work, a number of the essays in the collection provide innovative arguments that build upon facets of Bolton's own

work. In this way, Bolton's prolific body of work that spans over sixty years acts as a lodestone for the collection as the various contributors tackle a myriad of historical topics. The theme of evolution in historiography is thus prevalent throughout the twelve essays as many reveal the manner in which Bolton's historical method became more nuanced and accounted for developments in the craft of history without completely moving away from his original core arguments. This is directly detailed in Lenore Layman's chapter, which provides a biographical sketch of Deborah Hackett, the subject of one of Bolton's unfinished projects. Layman notes Bolton's views on Western Australian colonial society, and how his theory of a hierarchy-less, consensus-based society distinct from the east coast remained constant throughout his career, yet evolved to face the criticism of a new generation of historians. Similarly, Tim Rowse and Elizabeth Watt note how Bolton's work took on a greater emphasis towards indigenous history in the closing decades of the twentieth century compared to his earlier work that, while not excluding indigenous people, in Bolton's own words presented a narrative 'too much through the eyes of the white Australian land-takers' (213).

Stuart Macintyre's introduction and opening chapter is complemented by a contribution from Carol

Bolton. Macintyre, utilising a more conventional approach of relying upon personal letters to both chart Bolton's life and paint a portrait of Bolton's personality, depicts a historian who, throughout his early career, struggled for recognition and success. His eventual role as a contributor to the wider public discourse is explored in depth throughout Jenny Gregory's chapter that views Bolton as the 'peripatetic Professor' who took a reluctant, yet principled and nuanced approach during his forays into public debates that reflected the differing places he resided in throughout his life (171-3). In contrast, Bolton's wife regales the reader with personal anecdotes of Bolton and his views on balancing theoretical frameworks and a more empirical approach to history. The two opening chapters, along with snippets of the succeeding ten chapters, work in concert to craft a facsimile that provides readers with a snapshot of who Bolton was and what drove him to continue working in his chosen field until his passing.

As suggested by the opening line of the book's introduction, it is Bolton's reputation as 'the most versatile... of his generation of Australian historians' (xi) that remains the predominant theme throughout the collection. Each essay serves to firstly pinpoint a field in history where Bolton made a contribution, and secondly takes one of two approaches. Carl

Bridge's chapter detailing Bolton's contribution to decentring British history from a focus on England to Britain's peripheries, Graeme Davison's chapter that contextualises Bolton in the border developments in the field of public history in Australia, and Andrea Gaynor and Tom Griffith's chapter on Bolton's pioneering focus on both the urban and rural environment in environmental history provide surveys of each subject area contextualised against Bolton's writings. The other style is typified by Mark McKenna's chapter, which uses the example of Bolton's political biographies to reveal the shallowness and opportunistic nature of contemporary political autobiographies that flood bookshelves nationwide. Pat Jalland's chapter on the history of aging in Australia takes a similar approach through analysing the letters of the Palmer literary family which provides an important study in how the experience of aging was viewed by both the aged and the family members who cared for them. These divergent approaches serve to make the collection accessible to a wider readership who may not be familiar with the works of Bolton, while offering academic contributions in a variety of fields within Australian history for more specialised readers.

Another prevalent theme through the essays is a focus upon the importance of non-traditional primary sources

when constructing histories of places and people. Mary Anne Jebb utilises Jack Wherra's boab nut carvings to construct a history of the indigenous communities in the Leopold Ranges, revealing the continued importance of historical field work, and providing insight into Western Australian indigenous culture and how different cultures may perceive and record their own history. Likewise, Alan Atkinson's essay on the impact of Anglicanism in early Australia in part relies upon the temporal presence of churches and University buildings to stress the influence that early churchmen exerted upon society. Both examples reveal the importance of stepping outside of the archive and public record offices in order to construct complete histories.

The multitude of topics covered within *A Historian for All Seasons* typifies the impact and significance of Geoffrey Bolton's historical work. It is through further exploration of areas that Bolton either pioneered or significantly contributed to, conducted by the historians of this collection, that range from the history of regional Western Australia and Queensland, environmental history, to the history of ageing, which elevates this book from a mere laudatory exercise and to one that adds to the scholarship of a variety of subject fields within Australian history. In this way, a fitting tribute to Geoffrey Bolton is provided, a historian who, as

the title suggests, was never confined to a single specialty or historical methodology, but was rather a historian for all seasons.

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