

Our first ninety-nine senators: a review of the *Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate, volume 1**

R.L. Cope**

Introduction

'In an unhistorical age such as ours, even the immediate past seems so remote as to be antediluvian'.¹ Do these words of the American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb apply to Australia as they seem to apply to the United States? The period 1901–1929 covered by this volume is not exactly the immediate past and it may indeed seem antediluvian to some Australians. It is not a period in their personal memory. But a great many contemporaries have not only a more recent memory, but also an appreciation of how the Australian Senate is still evolving in our lifetime. This institutional capacity to develop a distinct and vigorous life of its own may indeed explain why some of the Australian political class evince such resentment against it. How did this institution evolve in this way? What are its antecedents and who are its 'sons' and pilots in its early formative years? The work under review, historically oriented and, at least in this volume, appealing more to distant and collective memory than to personal and near memory, gives rise to a range of considerations, which are not antediluvian, and pose some intriguing questions for reviewers and readers.

The present review is divided into two main sections. Section one considers formal aspects of the *BDAS*, such as structure, scholarly apparatus (appendices, index and notes), and style. Section two considers matters of content. The work is looked at from several points of view, asking what are its characteristics as an historical and biographical reference work, how it relates to the parliamentary institution in the

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** Parliamentary Librarian, NSW, 1962–91.

narrower (one house) and broader (two houses) context, and what are the standards and expectations which this first volume sets. We should not overlook that volume one is the first of a continuing series, so this is the appropriate occasion to address points of this kind. What, we might ask, are readers' legitimate expectations of a work of this kind? Other questions will arise in the course of a consideration of these guiding points.

Before the analysis gets into detail, let me state at the outset that we have a splendid volume for which to be thankful. Splendid in appearance and rich in content: few will want to dispute those words. It is an impressive and valuable publication to commemorate the centenary of Federation. Is there, we might wonder, to be a similar initiative from the House of Representatives? This work, keenly anticipated and long in gestation, signals a major advance in Australian parliamentary studies and scholarly resources as this review hopes to make clear. Its importance explains the length and nature of this review.

Section one: some questions of form and style

The editor has chosen an unusual arrangement of the contents of the dictionary: names of biographees are grouped by state, and within that arrangement entries are assembled according to date of election. The first entry is, thus, for Senator Albert (later Sir Albert) Gould from New South Wales. This grouping, first by state rather than in the usual alphabetical order, has much to commend it. As one reads through, for example, the entries for the fifteen senators from Queensland, a number of common threads emerge; the issues of White Australia and Kanakas, sugar and mining are dominant. To read all the Tasmanian entries as a group reinforces this impression of the merit of grouping entries by state. Whilst many issues date from pre-federation times, the continuing vehemence with which they were expressed, gives the reader a feeling of their vitality. Indeed, some of them are still vital and still with us. A kind of 'state profile' emerges through this arrangement of entries. This grouping also casts interesting retrospective light on the political history of the colonies and on the nature of the federation process with its passions and uncertainties. Not unexpectedly, many of the early senators had experience in both the federation process and in colonial legislatures, and some had held ministerial office in their own colonies. These pieces of the mosaic come together when the reader reads through whole sections rather than picks out individual biographies. The reality of the Senate as, even if notionally, a states' house, gains credibility through the way the structure of the work brings current and continuing state (colonial) issues, local dynamism and regional attitudes to the fore

The list of contributors to volume one, 59 in all (listed on pp.xiii-iv), contains some well-known names, but also some unknown to this reviewer. It would be useful to have some background notes on contributors, particularly so as to learn whether any are related to the people for whose entries they are responsible. Some contributors are officers of the Senate and one suspects that they were called on to do the entries for the less 'glamorous' senators. The editor's Preface (p.vii-viii) mentions that contributors are 'academics, independent scholars, research librarians and parliamentary officers'. Reference works can claim authority when their contributors bring acknowledged expertise and experience to their task, but other criteria are also important. The Advisory Board (p. xii) consists of ten persons who fall mainly into the class of academic historian and political scientist; some of them are also contributors. It is a

distinguished group whose guidance would have been valuable to the editor on matters of interpretation and detail.

What is puzzling to this reviewer is the 'status' of this work. The title page is unusual in what it leaves out: there is no place of publication or publisher mentioned. The verso of the title page makes it clear that the Melbourne University Press is the publisher, holds the copyright for the 'design and typography' and supplies the International Standard Book Number (ISBN), which is of interest to the book trade. Official Commonwealth publications have their own ISBN, but with recent changes to official publishing and the lamentable demise of the Australian Government Publishing Service (replaced in part by AusInfo), some public confusion in the public about official publishing is excusable. The dustcover of the work, however, adds an element of doubt by using the words 'The Department of the Senate in association with Melbourne University Press'. From this collocation of names one would assume that the Department bears the primary responsibility for the work since it does indeed hold the copyright for the text. It is not uncommon to find in works of mixed responsibility that both parties have their ISBN listed. Perhaps these are not issues to excite many bosoms, but they do raise what can be important points of principle and public policy about government publishing. The bare Cataloguing-in-Publication entry provided by the National Library (p. iv) will, it is to be hoped, be improved when volume two appears and there is perhaps more clarity on these points. It is interesting to recall that three editions (3–5) of the indispensable *Australian Senate Practice* by Odgers were actually tabled and printed as parliamentary papers. These editions can always be readily located in the set of bound volumes of federal parliamentary papers; the sixth edition, published by the Royal Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT Division), was tabled but not published as a parliamentary paper. The latest edition, the 9th, edited by the present Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, is published by 'Department of the Senate, Canberra' in 1999. It has a Senate ISBN.

Melbourne University Press is a prestigious publisher, but then, in its field, so is the Commonwealth Parliament, and, of course, the Senate. Perhaps the editor might be persuaded to publish a separate article or account on the project's genesis and the publishing policies. It would be useful to have details of the instructions given to contributors and to have light on some housekeeping questions, such as the nature of the research files built up, what information was not used, and so on. It would be a pity for these matters to remain undocumented in view of the importance of the work that springs from them. So little of this nature has been done in Australia that one would like the whole process to be recorded for the benefit of those coming after us.

From various clues the reader may suppose that the work is an official contribution by the Department of the Senate to the commemoration of the centenary of Federation. Strangely enough, this is not stated clearly or prominently. It is a major project requiring a lot of preparatory work and clearly worthy of assistance from the National Council for the Centenary of Federation, but there is no indication that this is in fact the case. Perhaps the Minister of the Centenary of Federation (Peter McGauran MP) might change his mind when he sees the importance of the work here reviewed.⁴ Curiously, the research paper project of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library entitled *Vision in Hindsight* carries the official Centenary of Federation logo and is presumably supported by the National Council. The leaflet, issued by the Melbourne University Press advertising the *BDAS*, states: 'This is another MUP book commemorating the

centenary of Federation' and the Introduction by H. Evans baldly states, 'This work is a contribution to the commemoration of the centenary of Federation' (p.11). It would be interesting to know what the other Commonwealth parliamentary departments have in store for us: they are all capable of contributing significantly to the commemoration of this occasion so germane to their existence. The Senate seems to have stolen a march on them in point of priority of publication.

As befits any self-respecting scholarly reference work, the *BDAS* has comprehensive notes and references, and an index in double columns covering pp. 455–479. The editor pays an appropriate acknowledgment to the indexer (Hilary Kent, p. ix). This indexer is responsible for the index to vols. 1–12 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and is thus an ideal person to carry out this new index. It cannot have been an easy assignment to index a text so rich in detail and names and offering difficulties which would not have been encountered in the other work mentioned. The editor alerts readers that the index contains references to topics that were to acquire importance in a later era. Students will be grateful for this hint. It is, however, inevitable that readers will expect to find index entries which have not in fact been provided.

Reasons of space and practicality are often decisive in determining indexing policy. This reviewer thinks it a pity that the indexing of matters relating to the press, so influential in those days for obvious reasons, is limited. There is a heading for 'Media ownership', a term which reads strangely for that era, but no entry or cross-reference for 'press' or 'newspapers'. There are entries under the names of some newspapers (e.g. *Boomerang*, *Progressive*, *Tocsin*), but none under *Age*, *Argus*, *The Freeman's Journal*, or the Melbourne *Punch*. Entries for Victorian senators contain, as we might expect, frequent references to the politically influential *Age*: it would be valuable to have these textual references accessible from the index. Naturally, the notes and references have numerous and full references to the *Age* and the other journals which have been consulted and cited. Some scholarly works may also index their notes and references, but this is not an invariable practice. The *BDAS* indexes the text alone.

A few additional comments might be made about inclusions in the index. Three additional page references (68,101,167) might be added to the entry for 'Parliamentary Library'. It could also assist users if, in appropriate cases, entries for personal names provided the person's title, status, or position; an example is 'Hutton, Edward', who was Major-General Sir Edward Hutton. There is no entry for 'Insanity, 307', but there is one for 'Tipping, 121'. (Senator Russell was insane whilst still a member, and Senator Ferricks had an aversion to tipping. The former fact seems more important than the latter.) There is no entry under 'Hansard' or 'Parliamentary Debates' which appears an oversight. From to-day's vantage point it would be good to have entries for 'Freedom of Information' (there is useful material on this on p.106). There are no references to the authors G. Sawyer or G. S. Reid who are quoted within the text: I imagine that this is a policy decision rather than an oversight. (They are referenced, of course, in the notes that are not, as pointed out, themselves indexed.) However, the quotes in the text that caught the reviewer's eye are just the kind of material that readers might well want to find again at a later date: this could prove difficult, especially if the reader only recalls the quote, but not the senator in question.

No doubt one could voice other cavils about this and, indeed, most indexes, but there is, on the other hand, much to praise in the index. It follows a consistent policy in indexing

names of persons and the myriad of bodies and organisations in the text. It is clearly printed and laid out. With regard to names of people, one is grateful for the numerous occasions on which all children of members are listed by name: this is not done by the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*. All these names are commendably indexed. The use of boldface for the names of senators in the index is also a good feature. The index makes efficient use of sub-headings under subjects or matters, which have many references. As a general observation, liberality in indexing, above all in reference books, is a cardinal virtue. Whilst we have reason to be grateful for what volume I does provide, may we hope that the index to volume II and its successors will be even fuller? Online databases with their fulltext retrieval capacity and finding aids will, of course, answer many of these points. Further consideration is given to these matters below.

Each biographical entry is accompanied by a small but very clear photograph. In many cases these photographs are the same as those in the *Parliamentary Handbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*. Judging by those the reviewer compared, the *BDAS* has greatly improved their clarity, although the later photos are smaller in size than the originals. What is left unclear, and perhaps can no longer be ascertained, is when the originals were taken: in other words, are we shown the faces as they were when the senators were in parliament, or are we shown photos of them at some other stage of their careers? Does it matter? Perhaps not greatly now, but the reviewer knows from the period he worked in the Parliament of New South Wales that members were keen to have official photos depicting them as favourably as possible. Photos from an earlier stage of life might be used rather than ones reflecting a less flattering contemporary reality. Few of us are free from this kind of vanity. An added attraction of the volume are the endpapers with the caricatures of ten senators by Low: they are well produced and neatly complement the text.

A word on the question of form and style might be appropriate. Impressions on style and tone are notoriously subjective and may not in the end count for much, but readers are sensitive to being asked to read what is ponderous, pedestrian or just boring. Comparing entries in the present work with entries for the same individuals in the major *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* provides useful material for forming an opinion on style, though others may draw different conclusions from the same material. We should note at the outset that the two works being compared have different orientations and readerships in mind, a point which will be taken up when we look later at actual content. In some cases the author is the same in both works: this makes comparison and contrast even more interesting.

The entries in the *BDAS* are all of much the same length, normally three to five pages long. Perhaps this relatively modest length is dictated by the fact that ninety-nine names have to be covered. Whilst most of them are interesting and of varying historical importance, not all are men of the highest eminence. A few senators, such as Sir Josiah Symon, a man some might consider of the highest eminence, have an entry running to six pages. It will be interesting to see whether major figures will be accorded more space in volume two. (Sir George Pearce will be an example.) Entries in *ADB* can be very lengthy if the person written about is of sufficient importance. For example, the *BDAS* has no entry of the length and robust assessment of that by James Griffin for Daniel Mannix in *ADB*, volume 10, pp 398–404 (in double columns). Entries in *ADB* have a certain uniformity (structure, tone and expression), which can make for colourless prose. This is why the Griffin entry catches attention: it is more engaged and

lively than the general run of entries. The subject in this case clearly merits this treatment. In contradistinction to the Mannix entry, most *ADB* entries are neutral in tone and betray little indication of the author's personality, approval or disapproval, whereas a valuable feature of the *BDAS* is that entries often reveal an evaluative comment or some mark of personal reaction to the subject.

Peter Ryan, who was for a long period manager of Melbourne University Press and publisher of *ADB*, has written a sympathetic note on it, in which he states:

Strict editorial discipline has not forbidden authors their spark of colour and originality, but all must conform to the basic, scholarly factual format; the *ADB* has never degenerated into an odd-sock drawer of personal enthusiasms.²

Peter Ryan's enthusiasm for *ADB* will be shared by other readers who also enjoy these volumes for 'engaging bedtime "dipping"' [ibid, p.88]. The *BDAS* will be equally, or even more greatly, enjoyed. The number of polished contributions in the Senate work is high, and some may be described as elegant pieces of scholarly writing. Above all, there is not much of the triteness sometimes found in works of parliamentary biography where we are told that the member 'was assiduous in his parliamentary duties and attentive to the interests of his constituents'. Whilst we do find references to 'a keen interest in parliamentary procedure', evidence is provided to substantiate this statement. In other words, stereotypes are avoided in the *BDAS* and the characters of the biographees emerge convincingly but within limits to be mentioned below.

Two qualities of this *Dictionary*, as distinct from *ADB*, are those of 'rhythm' and balance. They seem to characterise the flow within texts and the flow between entries. This is an aesthetic perception, which adds to the reader's pleasure and results from the type of grouping the editor has chosen. It is not easy to prove this point, but it is one that the reviewer thinks worth noting nevertheless. The *BDAS* can be read easily and with enjoyment for long stretches, which is not always the case with other similar works.

There is no indication that the text of the *BDAS* will become available online, either in toto or in summary. Nowadays this is not an unusual feature of even quite lengthy official publications and government reports. The Melbourne University Press would not be a likely agency for this purpose, but the Senate Department is. There may well be sound reasons for this not to happen, but it would be reassuring to know that the need has not been overlooked. The editor mentions that a database of material has been assembled for the compilation of the dictionary. Online access to this as well would be a boon to researchers and students. It is evident that Australian historical and parliamentary scholarship could derive much value from such access. The Commonwealth Parliament is indeed at present well advanced in providing online access via its various impressive websites to a host of information and publications. The suggestion made above is not out of keeping with the Parliament's present practices.

The *BDAS* has six documentary appendices listing dates of elections, names of office-bearers (presidents, chairmen of committees, government and opposition leaders). It is welcome that party affiliations are shown where appropriate. It would perhaps be useful to have a list of the principal parliamentary officers during this period. The *BDAS* has entries for the three Senate clerks in the era 1901–1929; an argument for a more generous coverage might well be made. More will be said on this question when we consider the content of the dictionary.

The reference apparatus of notes and other data is comprehensive. It is a noteworthy feature of this apparatus that ancillary data, such as titles of publications by senators, are generally provided. This is not always the practice of *ADB*, for instance. It is refreshing to see newspaper references providing page numbers as well as the date to the numerous articles cited. As we might expect, numerous references to parliamentary debates are made and clearly identified. A great part of the interest and depth in the biographical entries springs from the details that are quoted from the pages of Hansard. Equally valuable are the numerous references to correspondence in the private papers and archives of senators and other politicians. These are located in various depositories, often the National Library of Australia. They have been widely drawn on by almost all the contributors to the dictionary. Less apparent as a source, and, perhaps, not of similar value for this work, are the archives of the Senate itself: one reference to the Letter Book of the Senate, 1901–1916 was noted (p. 419). One suspects that there may be more to be gleaned from those letter books and other parliamentary archives, such as those of the Department of Parliamentary Reporting Staff and of the Parliamentary Library.

Contents and Substance

In his 1965 review of the Sir Lewis Namier–John Brooke *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790*, the English historian, Sir Herbert Butterfield, discussed the methodology of compiling such a work. It will be recalled that this history is built upon individual biographies of the members of the Commons for that era. Butterfield calls the result ‘one of the most magnificent works of reference ever provided for the student of history’.³ But this considerable praise is tempered with some criticisms of the limitations of this methodology. We must bear in mind that Butterfield, himself a professional historian with speciality in this period, could bring a wealth of learning and historical acumen that are not held by the common reader, if such a work is likely ever to be consulted by such a person. Butterfield expresses the following opinion that is applicable to the *BDAS* as well:

In a great many cases, anything like portraiture has clearly been impossible, and, where this is attempted we are often given pieces of description by contemporary observers rather than the kind of account that comes from the historian’s total knowledge of the man and the relevant sources. The policy is a happy one for a reference-book of this kind, and it gives the reader the benefit of some interesting quotations. (p. 803)

But this is not what Butterfield sees as the historian’s real job; it gives rise to the impression that ‘history is being constructed by drawing direct lines between passages in contemporary sources...’ (*Ibid*). The problem is that these passages may need to be interpreted as ‘an index of a mind’, or interpreted ‘in the light of their context’. These are important points that make use of Hansard particularly vulnerable to misleading impressions. That the estimate of individual members by other members as given in Hansard can be as much fiction as fact does not need demonstration. Most valedictory motions in parliament must be read with this caveat in mind. Butterfield also reminds us about ‘the realm of easy hypocrisies in which anybody in any century will have said almost anything or everything in the course of a long lifetime’ [*Ibid*, p. 804]. It does not even need ‘a long lifetime’ as we can attest by reviewing some of the statements made about a recently retired senator by his erstwhile friends. Compare these with statements

made before this senator's fall from grace with his Party. None of this is exactly novel to those writing about parliamentary personalities, but when the personalities come from 'an antediluvian period', there are obvious dangers when the sources are exiguous or possibly flawed.

It would be misleading to draw close parallels between the work Butterfield was reviewing so masterfully and the present *BDAS*. The points he makes are worth considering and are helpful when we try to formulate our own impressions of the Australian work, but we must also seek criteria appropriate to the work under review. The British work is a substantial contribution to historiography and seeks to explain and interpret situations that were not fully understood in the record of British political and parliamentary history. A large body of collateral historical research, interpretation, and monographs on personalities of the era already exists, so the British work is set against a background quite different in quality from the Australian one where the pioneering spirit must be given full weight.

The entries in the *BDAS* are not exactly portraits in Butterfield's sense, nor are they vignettes ('a brief evocative description'), but rather something that has aspects of both and then something more. They are firstly what one expects from a self-contained, one-volume reference work: a precise, accurate account of personal facts and significant dates such as family background, religion, marital status, educational background, political development and details of a parliamentary career in colonial legislatures as well as the Senate. We are given something of the flavour of the personality concerned, including the occasional idiosyncrasy (Senator Neild, for instance), and cultural and sporting interests. Senator Gregor McGregor's near blindness and his reliance on an exceptional memory are noted (p. 156). Mention of cultural interests is usually bare; for instance, we learn that Senator Richard Abbott was an 'art lover', but what that term embraces remains unclear (p. 329). Mention of senators' appearance and stature occurs where this is significant (Senator Needham is a good example). It is intriguing to learn of members, such as Senator C. G. Henderson, who 'began his working life at the age of eight or nine years as a boy in a Northumberland coal mine' (p. 356). Even more extraordinary was the case of Senator Glassey: 'From the age of six, Glassey worked a sixteen-hour day . . . for a daily wage of one penny' (p. 92). They were not the only senators to have sprung from humble origins. Such information makes us realise the harshness of life for many in the nineteenth century.

As regards educational background, the names and nature of many educational establishments listed may convey little to most of us, but what is an underlying theme with senators from less affluent backgrounds is the importance of reading, self-education and clubs, especially debating clubs, where men could improve themselves. Much social history is implied in all this and the *BDAS* is a good source to find a general orientation. Themes like this come alive in its pages, even if only briefly.

The reviewer noted with particular interest the reference by Senator James Stewart (Queensland) to the lack of socialist literature in the nascent Parliamentary Library (although presumably he would have had access to the rich holdings of the Victorian Parliamentary Library) (p.101). It is sometimes forgotten that, especially for working class members, the parliamentary libraries were used for self-education in a way we would nowadays find surprising.⁵ Are the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library's loan records of members' reading in that era still extant? Have they been checked? (The

NSW Parliamentary Library's handwritten loan registers for many decades in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exist, but seem scarcely to have reached scholarly notice.)

The entries do not attempt much in the way of an assessment of the morals or private lives of senators, although mention is made of various issues of this kind. Senator John William Croft had some shadow over his name in connection with bribery in an election (p. 355). The curious case of Senator Sir Alexander Matheson whose election to the Senate led to the first disputed return in its history (p. 345) also involved Croft who was secretary of the Political Labor Party in Perth.

Readers may ask whether moral questions concerning the private life of members are relevant to the purpose of the work. The degree to which we are exposed to moral delinquencies, corruption in money matters (travel rorts are popular at present), and sexual preferences of public figures ranging from the Royal family to members of parliament is perhaps more a hallmark of our time. But we did have *The Wild Men of Sydney* in colonial times. To read in a major newspaper such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* (28 October 2000) a report of a former prime minister's 'colourful language', is not so much shocking as a timely reminder not to 'idealise' public figures: they are as frail as the rest of us and perhaps even nastier.

We may thus realise that the account of the senators from 1901–1929 lacks this stratum of 'reality' to it: they seem generally models of proper moral behaviour and rectitude. Victorian virtues seem quite real, to judge by most of the *BDAS* entries. In this respect the *BDAS* seems strictly reticent, perhaps for reasons of prudence, or even with an eye to the future. When later volumes come to deal with still living persons (or their relatives), legal niceties cannot be overlooked. This is not to be taken of as a criticism of the work since it does not purport to be an exercise in 'portraiture' in the full historical sense, that is, the life in full in all its aspects. It is a distillation of the record, rather than the details of each member's life; it is a summation of the member's public career.⁶ But lest too bland a picture is suggested, mention is made of Senator Findley being expelled from the Victorian Legislative Assembly because the newspaper under his editorship published 'a seditious libel' of King Edward VII (p. 292). The *BDAS* index entry 'Corruption' has only three references: is this something to rejoice at, or does it give rise to speculation?

One qualification might be made to the statement that the *BDAS* largely avoids attempting to deal with behavioural aspects of senators. This is the question of alcohol. Few Australians and certainly no parliamentary officer can be unaware that alcohol and politics have a close association. The excessive addiction to alcohol is for some parliamentarians an occupational hazard. Political culture has a strong strand of this kind. Strangely enough, there is no entry for alcohol in the index, which is surely a mistake. On p. 84 we read concerning the estimable Senator Andrew Dawson: 'Dawson's principal drawback was undoubtedly his problem with alcohol'. John William Croft is reported to have had the same affliction as his wife, that is, 'the overuse of alcohol' (p. 355). The role of Senator John Gardiner in relation to alcohol (quoted on p. 43) deserves an entry under 'alcohol'. Senator Gardiner, who had 'witnessed the effects of alcoholism at close quarters' (meaning?), was 'a lifelong temperance advocate' (p. 45). This item is indexed under 'Temperance Advocates' but an added entry under 'Alcohol' might be also appropriate. It is worth noting that the

Senate set up a Select Committee on Intoxicating Liquor and Australian Soldiers in 1918. The heading 'Temperance Advocates' is not adequate to cover alcohol and its evils. There is far more that could be said on this topic, but it is perhaps of greater interest to the historian of social and parliamentary culture than the purely political historian.

Since the Senate as an institution forms the unifying centre as well as the context or framework of the *BDAS*, this defines the readership it wishes to address and the scope of entries. This is one strong justification for the heavy use of Hansard for data. Bearing as well in mind the limited amount of space allotted to the entries, we would obviously be mistaken to expect too much analysis of influences and motivations in a senator's mental life and non-political pursuits, although elements of those are often presented. We are told of personal matters relating to family and relationships sufficient to acquire a general picture. For instance, Senator Buzacott's elder brother was a member of the NSW Legislative Council; Sir Simon Fraser was the grandfather of Malcolm Fraser; John Verran's son, John Stanley, became a member of the South Australian House of Assembly, numerous other fathers or fathers-in-law and sons were parliamentarians (Baker, Sargood, for instance), the Downers, Playfords and Fairbairns formed political dynasties, four members of the Northern Tasmanian Cameron family entered parliament (colonial and federal), and so on. Family relationships and political dynasties are an enduring characteristic in Australian politics. This is yet another reason to welcome the *BDAS*' policy of listing all the children of (most) senators by name.

One result of dealing with all 99 persons elected to the Senate in 1901-1929 means that John Maurice Power (1883-1925, NSW) is included: he was elected to a casual vacancy in 1924, but died two months later without ever having sat in the Senate. The article on him, pp.70-71, although understandably brief, is a masterly miniature of an emerging political career. Within this short compass Geoffrey Hawker has produced one of the small gems of the *BDAS*. Power's name seems worth resurrecting to notice.

The personality of the authors of the entries has already been mentioned as a welcome presence that distinguishes this work to some degree from the practice of the *ADB*. This presence is never obtrusive or otiose. In the entry for Senator James Charles Stewart we read on p. 103: 'Throughout his career as a senator, he remained a member of Caucus. There have been suggestions that Stewart left the Labor Party at one time. I have found no evidence for this'. This entry by Professor Joan Rydon displays her fine touch, also found in the other entries from her pen. Her entry for Senator Edward Harney (WA) is particularly felicitous.

In his entry for another West Australian, Richard Buzacott, Professor Geoffrey Bolton states: 'Buzacott must have been one of the least loquacious members of the Senate, but this does not necessarily imply that he was among the least useful' (p.367). This kind of comment from a seasoned scholar adds an extra flavour to the *BDAS*.

But other contributors could also be mentioned by name: perhaps rather than present a 'report card' on them, the reviewer will state that he did not find any entry he thought weak and he found many that are outstanding.

What do we learn from the *BDAS* about the development of the Australian party system? One of the surprises to come from reading through the *BDAS* is the number of men from a labour background who were opposed to being bound by Caucus (Blakey,

p. 312, Grant, p.55, Gardiner, p. 46), or who left Labor before the conscription split (Charleston elected 1901 as a Free Trader had earlier been a Labor member of the South Australian Upper House; Trenwith, the 'first labour representative' (p. 298) in the Victorian Parliament, was the first Independent elected to the Senate; Glassey, 'widely regarded as Australia's first Labor MP' (p. 92), is another example of a sturdy strain of independence which led him out of the Labor Party). A number of Labor senators expressed views about their freedom of opinion against a party line, but the party system gradually became firm so that there is a steady increase in lamentations about the tyranny of party discipline (cf. p.4–5). Much of this is, well known to political historians but it is striking to see its emergence throughout the pages of the *BDAS*.

Since all these entries are brought together to mark membership of the Australian Senate, the reader is naturally interested to learn something about how these men viewed and shaped this creation of the new Constitution. They displayed every awareness that the Senate was an innovative parliamentary entity, not just another upper house along the lines of the colonial legislative councils. The first intake of senators consisted of men who, for the most part, had participated in the federation debates, had been active in colonial legislatures which had an experience of upper houses in conflict with lower houses, and were not political novices: these factors are reflected in their understanding of the Senate's role in the new Commonwealth. There is ample material in the biographies of the first senators to document their strong support for a Senate with its own substantive role in the parliamentary process. Very early, senators demonstrated a resolute opposition to efforts to minimise the Senate's powers and independence. These attitudes transcended for some time any kind of party line or class distinction. It is perhaps in this light that we might note that the Parliament's first select committee was initiated by the Senate, a move that blossomed some decades later in the creation of the notable committee system of the Senate. Queensland Labor Senator James Stewart (1901-1917) expressed strong support for a committee system in the Senate (p.102): it would be interesting to correlate his views with those of other senators of the time.

The question of the Senate as a 'States' House' naturally arises in a number of entries. It was a matter of opposing views and, as Harry Evans states in his *Introduction*, 'We search in vain from the very beginning for any evidence of senators voting in state blocks' (p.4). He rightly points to the growth of party discipline as a strong influence in changing perceptions of the Senate's role.

The Senate's first President, Sir Richard Baker (SA) played a very significant constructive role in drawing up standing orders and, in particular, in opposing the proposal that the Senate adopt rulings and practices of the House of Commons when need arose. Baker opposed this, 'thus reinforcing the independence of Senate standing orders and the significance of his own rulings' (p. 142, cf. p. 1–2). Baker's tenure of office is of such importance that one regrets that the entry on him is only the 'standard' 5 pages in length. The status of the Senate *vis-à-vis* the other House was another matter on which he (and other senators) were firm and clear in their perception of what the Founding Fathers had intended. The index has a number of entries under 'Senate: powers relative to the House of Representatives' to satisfy any curiosity on this point.

The first Labor President, Joseph (Harry) Turley (Queensland) had a background as a wharf labourer. He was also a man of strong individuality and firm principles: 'Devoid

of pretension, he heralded a new era [in 1910] by discarding the wearing of wig and gown' (p 110). Was this something for the *Guinness Book of Records*? It would be interesting to know whether any presiding officer in colonial legislatures before Turley had done the same. Turley seems an ideal candidate for a Labor icon, particularly in Queensland, but may be largely unknown these days. The *BDAS* may help to redress this.

Another early indication of the feeling of senators with regard to the 'status' of the upper house is shown in their sensitivity about the salaries paid to the permanent officers of the two Houses. Baker was instrumental in having the salaries of Senate officers set at the same level as those of officers of the House of Representatives (p. 142, cf. p. 235). We see here the beginnings of a 'Hundred Years War' of disputation about status of parliamentary officers, reflecting, it would seem, the position in bicameral parliaments elsewhere. In 1906 Senator Clemons (Tas) moved that the salary of the Usher of the Black Rod be reduced (p. 226). We are not told who the hapless Usher was, but this Senator, much given to moves to reduce public expenditure, also opposed travel allowances for senators. Even more curious is the action of Senator James Stewart (Queensland) who thought Senate officials so well paid that 'he might consider applying for a parliamentary post.' (p. 101). What salary did he receive as a parliamentarian, and how did it compare with that paid to senior Senate officials?

What does not emerge as clearly as readers might like is information about the length of sessions, and travelling and financial arrangements for senators (how much were they paid, what travel and per diem allowances did they receive? Did they have travel passes or did they submit accounts of travel costs? Recalling the many contemporary abuses in Australian parliaments with regard to travel allowances, the genesis of the system in the Senate is of more than passing interest). One senator claimed that it took him two weeks to travel from Melbourne to Cairns which seems an exaggeration, but his point was that short and sometimes arid sessions were a double burden when travel to distant parts of the continent is taken into account (Givens, p.105). This is surely one reason that the West Australian senators were particularly active in supporting the building of a railway linking the west to the eastern seaboard. Tasmanian senators were also vocal on the question of coastal navigation and transport.

Could background information relating to these domestic matters discussed above form an appendix in the forthcoming volume II? The editor might also consider providing an appendix with some of the classifications (professions, place of birth, etc) done in the index volume to *ADB*. When the set of the *BDAS* becomes more substantial, there may well be a good argument for a supplementary volume cumulating the individual volume indexes and appendices, and adding new information, including a comprehensive and well-organised bibliography of the Australian Senate. Those are big jobs, but if undertaken over a period, they will prove manageable and extremely valuable when finished. One day the Australian Senate will have its institutional historian and the Australian public may receive a history of the institution as distinct from the political role of the Senate.

There are three entries for the Clerks of the Senate for the period 1901–1929. These are important and fill out the picture of the evolution of the Senate as a vigorous upper house able to hold its own with the House of Representatives. These Clerks were all men of ability and dedicated public officials. A knighthood was recommended (but not

bestowed) to one of them on retirement (p. 389). The award of honours and decorations to parliamentary senior staff is worth a study of its own: it will reveal further aspects of the nature of parliamentary culture in the Westminster tradition. We must only regret that so few retired senior Australian parliamentary officials have published accounts of their careers and experiences. One would like to know much more about the management role of the Clerks and how the whole bureaucratic apparatus and service infrastructure of the Parliament evolved. The reviewer was surprised to read that in 1910 there was a serious attempt to amalgamate all the parliamentary departments into one (p.385). This did not, of course, succeed, but even in the last decade attempts to amalgamate the non-House departments of the Parliament have occurred and partly succeeded. This recurring issue, a parliamentary minefield of the first magnitude, is often the plaything of highly placed political adversaries. The Clerk in 1910 was Charles Boydell from the NSW Parliament where 'territorial' battles between officers of the Assembly and the Council were not unknown and still seem waged with enthusiasm. Incidentally, Charles Boydell's brother Sydney was Clerk of the NSW Legislative Assembly from 1927–1930. Memoirs of both Boydells would have been worth reading.

Only one question may be raised at this point: why are there entries only for the Clerks? The reader is curious to learn more about the Senate's emerging bureaucracy, which is surely a matter of importance. The reviewer hopes this request can be met as an appendix in a forthcoming volume.

The Senate and the House of Representatives were two of the emerging institutions created by federation. The other major institution created was the High Court of Australia. The attitudes of the first senators to the High Court, its composition and role, and the right of appeal to the Privy Council against its decisions, were sharply divided. The biographies make these points clear and the debates, seen from to-day's vantage point, raise points still of relevance. But the same applies to a number of other issues: republicanism, the site of the federal capital, and systems of voting are three of these. The variety of other equally important issues makes for excellent reading (and instruction), but space precludes following up on this aspect of the *BDAS*: the reader is urged to consult it personally.

One of the best things in the *BDAS* has been saved for comment until last: this is the *Introduction: The Senators, the Senate and Australia, 1901–1929* by Harry Evans, Clerk of the Senate (pp 1–11). Evans has produced a masterly survey of the topic that, as the title of his introduction indicates, is encompassing. Dividing the period 1901–1929 into three subdivisions, he offers excellent and impressive summations of what the *BDAS*' entries reveal. He brings together a great amount of information, adds his own shape to it, producing an account which will be valued by historians and scholars, but which is easily accessible to readers as well. The best picture of what we might call emerging 'Senate culture' is to be found in this introduction. The large amount of detail provided by the biographies calls for a summary and commentary of this kind to round off the whole and to stimulate others to check their perceptions of the era. That there is no final word on the topic, only degrees of assent to the pictures drawn is no secret. Assent is commanded by the authority and depth of knowledge of the person drawing the picture. Harry Evans can scarcely have a rival for his command of the history and significance of the Australian Senate. His introduction to volume II is awaited with curiosity and high expectations.

Conclusion

The men dealt with in the *BDAS* emerge as a group of mostly vigorous, effective and impressive individualists. Some, such as the Tasmanian Senator, John Henry Keating, are particularly attractive and worth following up. Keating, the youngest member of the first parliament in 1901, was an expert in copyright law and the man said to be responsible for the production of the indispensable *Commonwealth Official Year Book* (p. 233). Another senator, whose career was equally prestigious and who seems as attractive, is the West Australian Senator, Edmund Drake-Brockman. He was in the Senate in the 1920s (p. 368–371). The reader will come across others of their ilk. It speaks volumes for the success of the *BDAS* that the reader feels stimulated to read the Hansard debates on many issues of the day. The history of Australia is evoked in so many ways in the *BDAS*' pages that one would wish it in the hands of older high school students as well as university students. There are excellent clues for good research and thesis topics to be found in it.

Enough has been said to make readers of this review aware that *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate 1901-1929* is a major work in its first volume and an indispensable reference undertaking of much value to a wide range of students and to citizens in general. It is both a reference book intended to provide facts, information and orientation, and it is an incitement to read further on many matters. In this time of emphasis on political and parliamentary education, we have with this book a fine example of what can be achieved. In addition to its own merits, it heightens our expectations of the succeeding volumes: they have a high benchmark to meet. But even more, it awakens a deeper interest in to-day's Senate: how do our modern senators measure up against their predecessors?

Future historians of the Australian Senate and of the evolution of the Commonwealth are immeasurably assisted by the existence of this authoritative and engaging work, and we can only express thanks and admiration to those who have so ably made it possible. ▲

References

1. Himmelfarb, Gertrude: *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. New York, A. Knopf, 1995. See page 249.
2. Ryan, Peter: 'The ADB', in *Quadrant*, v. 44.6 June 2000: 87–88.
3. *History of Parliament: The House of Commonwealth 1754–1790*. By Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke. (Vol.1: Introductory Survey, Constituencies, Appendices. Vols. 2 and 3: Members). London, HMSO, 1964. Reviewed by Herbert Butterfield in *English Historical Review*, v. 80 (1965): 801–805.
4. F. Crowley's *Big John Forrest 1847–1918*, published in 2000 by the University of Western Australia Press, is issued with support of the National Council for the Centenary of Federation and bears the latter's logo on the verso of the title page. This work will also be of interest to readers of the *BDAS* although Sir John was a member of the House of Representatives.
5. The development of the Parliamentary Library is recorded in *The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, 1901–27 and the Origins of the National Library of Australia*, by M. and A. Osborn (pub. by Department of the Parliamentary Library in association with the

National Library of Australia, 1989). On p. 22 the authors state: 'For the first decade more senators than representatives attended meetings of the Library Committee; hence early Library policy was determined largely by senators; later the position was reversed'. Senator J. C. Stewart was a member of this committee from 1903–1917. I cannot find that this work was noted by any contributor to the Senate dictionary. J.S. Weatherston's *Commonwealth Hansard* (2nd ed., 1940) is unproductive for the type of information of interest in the present context.

6. It is generally believed that each age must write anew the history of the past. Ours is increasingly a 'psycho-biographical' age and we are more aware of the hidden presence of drives and motives in behaviour and action which earlier times would have seen with different eyes. The need for public figures to conceal, for example, unacceptable sexual preferences and the like leads to dangers such as blackmail and vulnerability to more subtle pressures. It is remarkable in Australia that so few instances of these dangers to politicians have emerged publicly. The Arkell case in New South Wales, and the earlier (1982) Arthur case (the murder of a former federal MP by someone who had worked in the parliamentary dining room) indicate the quicksands that are present. In Britain, the Mandelson case, recently documented (1999) by Paul Routledge, contains instructive material (*Mandy: The Unauthorised Biography of Peter Mandelson*, see page 109 for instance).