



Alison Patrick
(1921–2009)

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I had the good fortune to be an undergraduate and postgraduate student of Alison's, and then a colleague, as well as to have her as a mentor and friend. I was first taught by Alison as an undergraduate in 1968, and then tutored for her in a subject that – for all its changes of content – still bears the same name she gave it almost forty years ago, 'The Age of Revolutions'.

In her splendid account of her childhood, published in *The Half-Open Door*, edited by Pat Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan, Alison commented of her father as I would now of her: 'Our father insisted on precision in the use of words and punctuation; he expected us to ask questions and to be entitled to explanations; he had a very clear mind.' So did Alison: my PhD chapter drafts were always returned within a day or two dotted with her distinctive, fine handwriting.

Alison was the first to admit that she owed much to the good fortune that she had been born into a household which so valued critical learning and feisty debate. This was a family which accepted and encouraged her passion for books and history. As she put it in her autobiographical sketch, with admirable frankness and modesty, 'I had a retentive memory (!!), an appetite for detail, and almost unbounded curiosity; I was thought to be intelligent'.

Alison was the first woman elected rather than appointed as a Head of Department in the University, in 1977. Not only was she Head of History, but some years later was asked to serve a term as Head of Italian.

It was at this time, too, that Alison played a significant role in the organisation of the first George Rudé Seminar, here at the University of Melbourne in 1978, together with Bill Murray and others.

The great monument to Alison's scholarship is of course her 1972 book, *The Men of the First French Republic*. Her prosopography of the 750 deputies in their awesome debates about the fate of Louis XVI in early 1793 is a masterpiece of painstaking,

intelligent analysis, resulting in a volume quickly welcomed as the standard work on this parliament. Few Australians have written a history of another society which has such a high standing.

Alison loved the drama of the French Revolution with a passion. She was also a major contributor to the monumental *Dictionnaire des constituants*, on the men of the first revolutionary parliament of the Revolution in 1789–91, produced by her friend Edna Hindie Lemay in 1991.

In 2006 the Department of History produced a fine volume of six articles dating from 1970 to 2005.

There are two main themes of the collection. One is the high politics of the Revolution, some of it reflecting Alison's masterpiece on divisions in the National Convention of 1792–93 and also her final work on the early Revolution. Alison always enjoyed maps, details and statistics, and it is thanks to her bright idea of plotting on a map the geographical origins of those who dominated the early years of the Revolution that she discerned something others had not noticed.

The second key theme is what we might call the social history of administration. Alison loved being a HOD. Like any good administrative head of a university department today, Alison's fellow administrators two centuries earlier in France had to cope with apparently limitless demands for information from 'the centre' and proportionately constrained resources. Her insights were remarkable.

The collection bears the hallmarks of Alison's scholarship: formidable erudition, a capacity to ask a fresh question, and a sharp, distinctive prose style.

The foreword to the work was written by Tim Tackett of the ACI, one of the leading English-language historians on France, who commented to me: 'I'll never forget my many friendly and stimulating encounters with her over the years.' Other prominent international historians who contacted me to express their admiration for her include John Merriman, Peter Jones and Sian Reynolds.

Alison, I will always admire you for your long and continuing commitment to scholarship and the collegiate life of the historical profession. On behalf of the international community of historians, I thank you for your contributions to knowledge, just as I thank you for your personal gift to me and other historians, in Melbourne and around the world.

Peter McPhee