



John Manning Ward

JOHN MANNING WARD

1919-1990

When John Manning Ward died in the tragic rail accident on 6 May 1990 (along with his wife, Patricia and daughter Jennifer), the University of Sydney lost its most honoured and representative figure in recent times. Our discipline lost a powerful interpreter of imperial and Australian studies. And our Academy lost one of its senior and esteemed Fellows.

John Ward came to the University of Sydney as a student over 50 years ago (in 1936), became a teaching member in 1944, and was appointed 3rd Challis Professor of History in 1949, and later Chairman of the Board in Divinity. After the appointment to the Arts Faculty he worked widely in the Sydney community, in the spheres of libraries and archives, the HSC examining boards, the Royal Australian Historical Society, and the History Teachers' Association. He took a keen interest in our Humanities Academy and was its Vice President. He also became the last chairman of the old Professorial Board (1974) and The University of Sydney, and the first chairman of the new Academic Board (1976). Throughout, he continued to have a special concern for his Faculty, his own discipline and his department, even after he became Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) in 1979 and then Vice-Chancellor and Principal in 1981 – the first Sydney graduate to hold that high position. Until only a few years ago he conducted honours seminars in history, on law and industrialization. His outstanding defence of the ideals of a liberal education, and independent research, drew from the first principles espoused by the humanities. As Vice-Chancellor he remained a humanities scholar.

John Ward's long career, and its many formal achievements, ultimately had about it the qualities of a special 'Sydney odyssey', especially centred about the old 'Quad', and the Faculty of Arts. He was born just to the west of the Quad, in Strathfield; and, after the notable influence of the redoubtable Fort Street High, coupled with Presbyterian humanism, he arrived in the Arts Faculty to take a broad range of humanities courses, including language and history studies. Family memory recalls the intellectual excitement which he took home in Lent Term 1936 after beginning his studies. He graduated with First Class Honours and the University Medal in History, in 1939. During the War years he worked as administrative assistant to the NSW Premier, Bertram Stevens, and also ventured into journalism: overseas military service was ruled out because of a childhood hearing disability. From 1944, however, he was back in the Quad, having responded to an urgent call from Professor S.H. Roberts to assist with a crisis of teaching loads in the faculty. Five years of intense application followed, as John Ward concurrently took to university teaching, researched, wrote and published his first historical book, completed earlier legal studies, and was called to the Bar (1948); and then competed, in a talented field, to become Challis

Professor, when Roberts became Vice-Chancellor. John Ward was now all of twenty-nine years old.

The post-War decades were times of immense strain, growth and transition for the University, and the young professor played a central role in the process. The University expanded dramatically, especially after the Murray Report, and John Ward creatively and judiciously undertook significant development of the History Department. Outstanding scholars were added to the establishment – A.G.L. Shaw, Barry Rose, Bruce Mansfield, Edwin Judge, Ernst Bramstead, Patrick Collinson, Jack McManners, to name only a few of the past. In the 1970s, Marjorie Jacobs became a Professor in the Department. The curriculum ultimately reflected a global range of cultures, and a great span of time. It was not a 'School', and John Ward sometimes reflected, in a genial manner, on the difference with developments in Melbourne under Max Crawford and John La Nauze. He rather encouraged plural methodology and internationalism, informed by academic excellence and collegial civility. That was to be the Sydney style.

John Ward's own scholarship was focussed on British, imperial and colonial Australian history, though his teaching ranged almost around the globe: teasingly he would note the reluctance of modern scholars to teach outside their PhD specialisms. He wrote six significant books in a crowded life of professorial duties, punctuated by highly fruitful sabbatical leaves, taken (by ship) at St John's College, Cambridge; All Soul's Oxford; Yale University; and the Universities of Canada. As befitted the prize student of S.H. Roberts, the focus of the early studies was essentially institutional and metropolitan – *British Policy in the South Pacific, Earl Grey and the Australian Colonies*, and even *Colonial Self-Government* all emphasised the crucial role of the mother country in shaping the institutional growth of New Societies. But, increasingly, the books also carried his own stamp of mind, notably a concern for the role of law in colonial life, a fascination with 'liberal conservatism' as an ideology of controlled change in a colonial democracy, together with a deepening understanding of the evolving nature of Australian culture and identity. These elements most of all came together in his favourite and most personal book, a broadly set study of *James Macarthur, Colonial Conservative, 1798-1867*, which begins with the characteristic Wardian remark that 'Most of us are conservative most of the time'; and which, in fact, sets out John Ward's own attachment to principles of probity, pragmatic reform, and a sense of tradition, as essential to the good conduct of institutions and society.

History was to follow into his own life. John Ward's instincts were invariably more consolidationist than radical; yet he presided over radical changes in University government, and was often associated with proceedings that profoundly redirected its development. John Ward began in the age of the 'godprofessors' and left behind devolved faculties, with their own departmental boards, having also pointed to new roles for the professoriate. He not only rode these tides of academic change in the University and Faculty, but contributed largely to the good sense and good will of the outcome. That should be remembered, long after the heated controversies of how it all came about.

His character, personality and style contributed not a little to this inner history of the institution. He could certainly be confident and courtly, both professional and professorial. Yet he also retained about him an early shyness, and a gentle reserve. Combined with a certain endearing 'unworldliness', it made him a very human academic. He had a laconic sense of humour, and a wry turn of phrase, which belied his formal grey suits and homburg hats. Former students still recall wry 'Wardisms' in lecture-asides. Those of us who worked closely with him can also recollect his sense of the ridiculous: the follies of academia gave him endless enjoyment. The capacity to see life in all its preposterous guises, allowed him the precious qualities of magnanimity and proportion. Coupled with a talent to compartmentalise activities, so as to live creatively in several spheres concurrently, it all inspired a major career.

From 1951 he also had the incalculable benefit and strength of Patricia Bruce Ward (nee Webb) as his spouse. A Sydney Arts Graduate, from a noted seafaring and intellectual family, Patricia Ward had direct connections to the British Fabians. (John Ward had come to know her on the first of his sabbatical voyages to Cambridge). She was a highly professional librarian, whose service to both the development of librarianship, and to the protection of local government records in NSW, justly earned her a Fellowship of the Librarian Association of NSW (1983), and the Australia Medal (1989). A biographer of John Ward will find the vital importance of Patricia in his protean career, as also the role of a home environment, involving the professional careers of two highly talented daughters – Jennifer as a gifted teacher, Anne as a successful Barrister. John Ward was sensitive to issues of Equal Opportunity in academic environments, and it is no chance that his tenure as Vice-Chancellor saw the establishment of the new Women's Centre. More personally, John and Patricia Ward will also be recalled for very many acts of individual kindness to members of faculty in times of difficulty or illness. His private pleasures ranged from music, to detective novels and steam trains.

John Ward had, of course, anticipated an active retirement, in which a major focus was the making of a trilogy on Australian conservatism, following volume I, *James Macarthur*. While Vice-Chancellor he did in fact research and write a first draft of volume II, concerned with Australian society through the crucial years of the 1860s to Gallipoli, and focussed around the theme of 'The State and the People'. We shall all the more lament the death of a scholar with work in progress, and with something distinct to say. Reflecting on the different, but also protean career of James Macarthur, John Ward however penned words in 1981 that now have a special power in his own life: a journey of challenges, changes and difficulties, pleasures and achievements, had ultimately left him 'reconciled to himself, and to the community in which he lived. Death came at the happiest period in his life.'

Deryck Schreuder