All those involved in the production of *Humanities Australia*, whether as editors, authors, designer or hard-working members of the Academy’s Secretariat, were delighted by the enthusiastic response last year, both from Fellows of the Academy and the wider community, to its inaugural issue. We were further delighted earlier this year to learn that Qantas has joined in the vote of approval by agreeing to feature copies of the journal in its lounges, and that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are supplying copies to Australian embassies and High Commissions abroad.

In one of the essays in this second issue of *Humanities Australia*, the distinguished linguist Anna Wierzbicka provides a clear and comprehensive definition of what is meant by the English term ‘the humanities’ and how it is distinguished from ‘science’, a distinction that, as she points out, does not exist in many other languages. Indeed, among Professor Wierzbicka’s many international honours is a recent award from the Polish Science Foundation. Her definition of what motivates those who devote their lives to the discovery and transmission of knowledge about the humanities includes the belief that ‘it is good if people can know things of many kinds about people’.

The other essays in this issue provide excellent illustrations of some of the very different ways in which humanities researchers go about finding out these ‘things of many kinds’ about people from both the recent and more distant past. They also demonstrate the range and depth of work encompassed under the term ‘the humanities’, from digging up the remains of past civilisations in Syria, to studying the lives of a generation of women writers in twentieth-century Australia.

Of the many activities carried out by Fellows and staff of the Australia Academy of Humanities, one of the most enjoyable is the annual symposium, held in a different city each year. It allows Fellows, colleagues and the general public to come together to hear and discuss a range of presentations relating to current issues and research, as well as to meet up with those from their own discipline area. The symposia always feature at least one special lecture, and this issue includes the one given last year in Adelaide by the Academy’s
long-standing Honorary Secretary, Graeme Clarke. Professor Clarke and others have been engaged in archaeological work in North Syria since 1984. His lecture provides a fascinating summary of their discoveries over this period, demonstrating some of the ways in which it is possible to make ‘the mute stones speak’ in relation to excavations at Jebel Khalid, a fortified settlement on the right bank of the Euphrates that dates from the early years of the third century BCE.

In addition to the Annual Lecture, the Academy also sponsors a number of special lectures, thanks to generous bequests from deceased Fellows. The annual Trendall Lecture is given each year ‘by a distinguished scholar on some theme associated with classical studies’, as directed in the will of the late Professor A.D. Trendall. The 2009 Trendall lecture was delivered by Brian Bosworth, on the always fascinating figure of Alexander the Great. Through close examination of a wide range of classical texts, Professor Bosworth argues for the value of stories about Alexander, often dismissed as ‘mere anecdotes’, in bringing us closer to his beliefs and those of his times.

Since the rise of the internet, and especially since more recent developments like e-books, iPads and Kindles, the future of the printed book has been hotly debated, not least by those involved in humanities research, where the academic monograph has long reigned supreme. While there are many advantages in online publication of specialist journals and books, something that helps conserve natural resources while allowing for easy worldwide access to new research, many scholars in the humanities wish and deserve to attract a wider, non-specialist audience for their work. As with Humanities Australia, this is still best achieved through a handsomely produced, engagingly written and well-edited print publication. The cost of producing books of this kind, however, has been steadily rising, making it increasingly difficult for Australian scholars to find a publisher, especially for books on Australian topics, which do not appeal to a large international library market. Another of the Academy’s roles, therefore, is to provide subsidies to assist in the publication of significant books by both Fellows and non-Fellows. One such work, The Colony, went on to win the Prime Minister’s Prize for Non-Fiction, demonstrating that humanities scholarship can indeed attract a broader audience, even if it has almost 700 pages! We are grateful to Grace Karskens and her publisher for allowing us to include an edited extract from The Colony in Humanities Australia, to give readers a taste of the imaginative ways in which she draws on extensive archival research to depict the places and people of early Sydney. As 2010 marked two hundred years since the arrival in Sydney of Governor Lachlan Macquarie, it seemed appropriate to choose an extract that focused on his period.

Susan Sheridan’s Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making their Mark, published by the University of Queensland Press in 2011, also received a publication subsidy from the Academy. The edited extract which appears here, again with thanks to Professor Sheridan and her publishers, introduces the main theme of the book, the difficulties faced by women attempting to establish writing careers in Australia in the decades after World War II, at a time when there was still great emphasis on the domestic sphere as the place for women. All of her nine writers married and had children, often also helping to support their families through paid work, but still managed to make memorable contributions to Australian literature, though in the case of some, such as Elizabeth Jolley and Amy Witting, recognition was late arriving.

The Arts, of course, is another of the discipline areas represented in the Academy, and in this issue we are also happy to feature two new poems by Chris Wallace-Crabbe. Both show the wit and wisdom that have always characterised his work, together with his love of word play. For, to return to Anna Wierzbicka’s definition, saying ‘things with words’, has always been essential to the humanities.