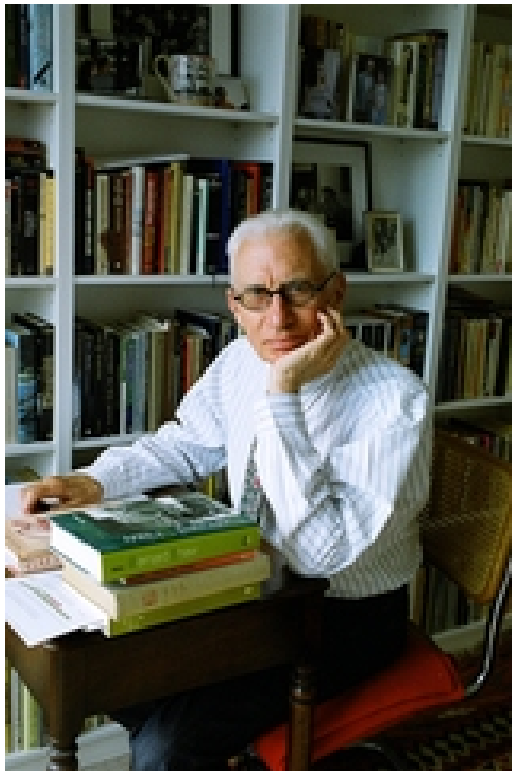


Ian Donaldson FBA FRSE FAHA

1935 - 2020



Australian Academy of the Humanities archives

Professor Ian Donaldson was born in Melbourne in 1935 and was educated at Melbourne Grammar School and the University of Melbourne. After graduating from Melbourne in 1957 Ian went to Magdalen College, Oxford where (as was common at the time) he undertook a second BA. He was a Harmonsworth Senior Scholar at Merton College from 1960 to 1962, and then a Fellow and Lecturer in English at Wadham College from 1962 to 1969. At Oxford, Ian was Chair of the English Faculty from 1968 to

1969. In 1969 Ian returned to Australia to take up a Chair in English at the Australian National University (ANU), where he remained until 1991. During that time, he helped to establish the Humanities Research Centre in 1974, and served as its first director. In 1991 Ian moved to Edinburgh to take up the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature, and then in 1995 he became the Grace 1 Professor of English at Cambridge University and a fellow of King's College. At Cambridge Ian established the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities, an institution that owed much to the model of the HRC, to which Ian returned as Director from 2004 to 2007. Ian then became an Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

Ian's long and distinguished career combined meticulous scholarship and an ability to steer centres that made a profound difference to intellectual life in Australia and Britain. Ian's publications range widely, especially in the early modern and eighteenth century periods. Throughout Ian's career there has been an abiding interest in Ben Jonson, and Ian has been the scholar most responsible for returning Jonson to the centre of any attention paid to early modern literature, a position which Jonson himself certainly expected to occupy, but one which by the mid twentieth century he seemed in danger of losing. Ian's first publication on Jonson was on *Epicoene*, in *The Review of English Studies* in

1967. Ian continued to publish on various aspects of Jonson's work throughout his career, culminating in the magnificent critical biography published in 2011, and the massive Cambridge University Press electronic and print edition of Jonson's complete works, of which Ian was co-general editor with David Bevington and Martin Butler, published in 2012–13.

Ian published numerous articles, but his books in particular represent major interventions in the field of literary studies. This is the case from his first book, *The World Upside Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding* (1974). One significant aspect of this book is its refusal to stop at some of the traditional period barriers that constrained literary history, so that it traverses the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such breadth of coverage requires a sustained erudition, which again was characteristic of Ian's scholarship from its earliest stages. Similar breadth can be seen in the 1982 study, *The Rapes of Lucretia*, but here Ian also ranges across literature, music, and art, and from the classical world through to the twentieth century with a discussion of Benjamin Britten's opera. The sensibility manifested in this book might be compared to the European tradition of comparative literary and cultural studies, with Ian demonstrating a breadth of knowledge and a lightness of touch.

Ian's continuing focus on Ben Jonson remained evident from his edition of the poetry for the Oxford Standard Authors series, which was published in 1975. As I have already noted, Ian was instrumental in rescuing Jonson from relative neglect during this period. His essay collection, *Jonson's Magic Houses* (1997), explores the biographical and social contexts for Jonson's work, and might be seen as preliminary studies leading up to the critical biography. Given the immense amount of scholarship that went into both the Cambridge edition of

Jonson, and Ian's critical biography, it is fitting that both appeared at more or less the same time. The biography, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, was published by OUP in 2011 and was shortlisted for the James Tait Black Biography Prize. It received universally favourable reviews, described in the *TLS* as 'an achievement that will be difficult to surpass', as 'quietly, conscientiously brilliant', and, in a succinct comment in *The New York Times Book Review* that exactly sums up Ian's scholarship, as 'deeply researched but happily readable'.

The Cambridge Edition of the Work of Ben Jonson, with Ian as co-general editor, is similarly a result of impressive scholarship but also of considerable organisational expertise. And this is the parallel area of Ian's achievement: work that is best described as being not in the humanities, but for the humanities. Ian's guiding hand on the Humanities Research Centre for its first sixteen years made a profound difference to the position of the humanities in Australian intellectual culture. Under Ian's watch, the Centre was able to attract visiting academics of the highest stature, but a key to its success for Australian intellectual life as a whole was the extensive series of seminars and conferences. These ensured that visiting fellows would not simply hide away while researching, but rather that they would mix with Australian academics and students in formal and less formal settings and stimulate local researchers. This first period of Ian's directorship saw him involved in the organisation of more than eighty conferences, many of them significant examples of collaboration with, for example, the National Library, National Gallery, the ABC, and the Academy of the Humanities. HRC liaison groups were established at every Australian and New Zealand university. Four hundred visitors from all parts of the world came to the HRC during the initial period of Ian's Directorship: 260 Visiting Fellows, who stayed for periods of between three and twelve

months, eighty Conference Visitors, who came for up to a fortnight, and sixty non-salaried Visiting Scholars. As an important part of Ian's engagement with issues surrounding the humanities and social sciences in Australia and overseas, he published a series of articles in various venues; one notable and prescient example was 'What Hope for the Humanities?', in *Zukunftsaspekte der Geisteswissenschaften: Herausgegeben von Bernhard Fabian*.

The success of the HRC led to Ian's establishment of a similar centre at the University of Cambridge where he served as Professor for seven years. The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities was established at Cambridge in 2001. Under Ian's direction it supported ten interdisciplinary research projects, and organized nearly thirty interdisciplinary conferences, many in relation to an annual theme (in 2001–03, The Organization of Knowledge; in 2003–04, Migration). The Centre invited about a dozen Visiting Fellows to Cambridge each year, and organized regular visits to Cambridge by the heads of all major UK national funding bodies. It has institutional links with the British Academy, the British Library, the British Museum, the National Gallery, London, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and collaborates with a number of institutions throughout the world, including the Getty Research Institute, the University of Bologna, the Huntington Library, and the ANU's Humanities Research Centre.

On his retirement from Cambridge Ian was invited back to head the HRC again, which he did from 2004 to 2007. Once again Ian was responsible for the now expanded Centre's extensive program of conferences and seminars, as well as its expansion into the supervision of postgraduates. By this stage the Centre had around twenty Adjunct Fellows and Professors, thirty Visiting Fellows annually, twenty-four doctoral students, three

administrative staff, and two shared IT officers. The HRC maintained the Freilich Foundation, which analyses the causes and effects of social bigotry. Ian also established a Biography Institute within the Centre.

Ian's final position was as an Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne, where his scholarship, his mentoring, and his public engagement continued unabated. In particular, Ian's work for the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) was especially notable. He was elected as a fellow in 1975 and served on the Council 1980–82, and 2005–12, as Vice-President, 1980–82, 2005–07, and as President, 2008–10, and Immediate Past President, 2010–12. In his 2009 lecture on 'The Idea of an Academy', delivered at the Academy's fortieth symposium, after a characteristically erudite summary of the history of learned academies, Ian outlined a typically prescient vision for the future. He suggested that there should be much more co-operation between the Academies in Australia to tackle big issues, that the representation of women within the Academies needed to be addressed urgently, and that the AAH should have a much more global focus. All three issues have indeed been addressed, at least to some extent.

As well as his connection to AAH, Ian's standing as a scholar was recognised by fellowships of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He also received honorary doctorates from the University of Melbourne and from ANU. These scholarly and administrative achievements are matched by Ian's demonstration that a lifetime devotion to the humanities might be reflected in a humane and generous character. As teacher, mentor, colleague, facilitator, Ian has been universally praised, and his contribution to the lives and careers of other people has been of immense and lasting value. Ian has been celebrated by many people for his genuinely inclusive approach to the

humanities. In a recent account of the history of the Cultural and Communication Studies section of the AAH, Meaghan Morris FAHA notes how in his role at the HRC Ian (and his colleague Emeritus Professor Graeme Clarke AO FAHA) 'made space over the decades for experimental and struggling projects to thrive'. Rather than feeling threatened, as some more traditional scholars might, by new approaches to disciplines, Ian encouraged them. There are many testimonials to Ian's great generosity of spirit. The art historian and biographer Frances Spalding notes Ian's 'unique blend of courtesy, sympathy, quickness, subtlety and knowledge'. The historian David Cannadine notes 'Ian's charm, his wit, his warmth, his generous scholarly brilliance, and the sheer joy of his company'. This abiding sense of Ian's generous spirit can be seen in his numerous contributions to a notion of the humanities as vital to the health of society – an idea that many may profess, but few have the intellectual and administrative ability to steer institutions like the HRC or CRASSH which enable the ideals of the humanities to be demonstrated in an active and effective way. Ian's scholarly legacy is equally certain to be long-lasting, especially through his championing of Ben Jonson as a key figure in our understanding of early modern literature and culture.

In his British Academy Shakespeare lecture of 2007, Ian offers a fascinating comparison of Shakespeare and Jonson, indicating, indirectly, why Jonson had such an appeal for Ian as an enduring subject:

This annual lecture recognises Shakespeare's undisputed genius, his unrivalled standing in the field of English literature. That modern consensus is in no way diminished if we recall that during the century or so following his death it was not William Shakespeare but Ben Jonson who was reckoned by many good judges to have been the greatest writer England had ever produced. Such a verdict, however fantastical it may appear to later

generations, was perhaps in part encouraged by Jonson's more forward style of self-presentation, which I have tried to illustrate here; and validated in part by Jonson's sheer versatility and ambition as a writer, venturing as he did into so many branches of humanistic learning: as poet, as deviser of Court and civic entertainments, as dramatist, as historian, philologist, rhetorician, as writer on statecraft, social conduct, theology, as England's first literary critic worthy of the name. Jonson too in his own fashion was a great factotum, a Dominus Do-All, but he found a more flattering name to describe his chosen role, and that name was Author.

Here we might see a parallel between the Jonsonian versatility that so fascinated Ian, and Ian's own skills in many dimensions across scholarship and institutional and social contributions. Ian represents a rare kind of scholarship that went hand in hand with an abiding character of empathy and generosity of spirit. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends, and by the whole international scholarly community.

Paul Salzman FAHA (with assistance from David McInnis and Grazia Gunn)

