



John La Nauze

## JOHN ANDREW LA NAUZE

1911-1990

John La Nauze was a foundation fellow of this Academy. He was a formidable scholar who brought to Australian History a new precision, an awareness of the wider world of ideas and a concern with major problems. His pioneering studies of the history of political economy in Australia (1949), political history and constitution making ('Tariffs' 1947, 1948, 1949; *Alfred Deakin*, 1965; *The Making of the Australian Constitution*, 1974) will long remain authoritative. His contributions, each founded on exhaustive research, are the more notable because his teaching career spanned the mean, understaffed 1930s and 1940s and the overburdened, expansive later 1950s and 1960s.

He was a splendid example of his generation of encyclopaedically learned teachers: he lectured at various times on Economics, English Literature, Economic History, Australian History and most periods of modern European and British History. By a singular set of circumstances, from the outset of his career La Nauze was acting head or head of his department in an era when god-professors carried heavy administrative and civic responsibilities. He disliked administration and academic politics, but his innate suspicion of vice-chancellors and bursars coupled with his dutiful devilling at papers made him a good in-fighter. He could be acerbic with colleagues and he was an aloof, impatient teacher of undergraduates, but he was scrupulous in his dealings with them and he was a model of what austere, dedicated scholarship could be. Privately, he was fiercely supportive of his juniors, many of whom owe their start to his exertions, not least his rigorous criticisms of their drafts. He twice to my knowledge quietly put aside his own work during periods of leave to help colleagues in trouble and at least once to edit the manuscript of a deceased colleague and see it through the press.

In 1974-75 he spent much time and emotional energy safeguarding the Australian Dictionary of Biography during a difficult transitional period. Some of his juniors were surprised to find him a genial, engaging host at home with Barbara, his calm, gently ironic wife. People who did not know him well feared his sharp tongue and pen, and this perception weakened the influence he ought to have wielded - particularly in constitutional questions and Australian History. The resonant La Nauze whisper often sliced through cant. At one gathering a charming English Stalinist was recalling his decision to learn Russian in the 1930s. He listed three Russian savants whom he then read, impressing his audience with their *recherche* names - except the irreverent, omniscient La Nauze whose mutter whipped across the room: 'Each gone by 1940'. He was a skeptic who believed passionately in reason, diversity and fairness: his heroes were Hume, Adam Smith, Gibbon and J.S. Mill. Churchill was a favourite poet. He was proud that two of his earliest publications reported on what probably were the first investigations of inequalities in educational opportunity in Australia (*Australian Educational Studies* 1940; *Education for Some...* 1943).

John Andrew La Nauze was born on 9 June 1911 at Boulder, Western Australia, the son of a bank officer of Irish Huguenot origins, and a school teacher. John's father was killed at Gallipoli. He attended Perth Modern School and the new University of Western Australia, where he read English under Walter Murdoch, whose love of poetry and liberalism remained with La Nauze all his life. He followed Murdoch in writing about Alfred Deakin and forty years on produced an affectionate memoir of Murdoch himself (1977). La Nauze went to Balliol College as Rhodes scholar in 1931 and graduated with the top first of his year in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and the Charles Elton Exhibition in English Literature. He remained deeply loyal to his college, like so many Australian-Balliol historians of his generation. He also valued the British Commonwealth, believing it to have wrought more good than evil in the world. In 1935 he returned to an assistant lectureship in Economics at the University of Adelaide and almost immediately became Reader after the death of E.O.G. Shann, his old mentor from Western Australia. He moved to Sydney University in 1940 as senior lecturer in Economics and was promoted as reader in the History of Economics in 1946. He was appointed to the Melbourne chair of Economic History in 1950 and transferred to the Ernest Scott chair of History in 1955, until his

invitation in 1966 to become Professor of History in the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University, in succession to Sir Keith Hancock. La Nauze's standing was recognized in many notable overseas appointments: Carnegie Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, in 1953; the first Australian to become Commonwealth Fellow at Cambridge in 1961-62; Visiting Fellow at All Souls in 1968-69; and inaugural Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard in 1978. He received the Ernest Scott Prize for his book on the Constitution. John La Nauze retired from his ANU chair in 1976 and died in Canberra after a long illness on 20 August.

*F. B Smith*