



**Philip Brown**

## *Philip Lawrence Brown (1904–1996)*

Philip Brown was a rare example of a private scholar of the highest quality in the early days of sustained study of Australian history.

He was born in Manchester on 15 January 1904 and with his family migrated in 1911 when his father, the Reverend Dr Francis Brown, was appointed headmaster of Geelong Church of England Grammar School. Philip was a student there from 1914 to 1922. Aided by a scholarship, he entered Trinity College, University of Melbourne, to take an arts degree, including history under Ernest Scott.

He did not complete his BA until 1930, having interrupted his course to become successively a cadet journalist on the *Argus*, a jackeroo and an opal miner at Coober Pedy — thus Australianising himself and developing a strong feeling for the environment. This knocking about, combined later with war service, gave him that knowledge of the world and of human nature which is so essential for the historian.

Early in the 1930s Brown was commissioned to edit the papers of the Clyde Company 1836–73, a pastoral enterprise originating in Scotland, based on Golf Hill near Geelong, controlled by George Russell with a supporting network of Russell relatives and friends. From 1934 Brown spent several years working in Scotland and at Oxford, supervising the lavish production by Oxford University Press of *The Narrative of George Russell* (1935) and the first volume (1941) of *Clyde Company Papers*. Six more volumes followed between 1952 and 1971. Brown's annotations were meticulous, his writing style inimitable. The drama department at Deakin University eventually quarried and produced two plays based on *Clyde Company Papers*.

In Victoria in the 1940s and 1950s, historical study of Western District pastoralism dominated: Brown worked in close association with Marnie Bassett and Margaret Kiddle, authors of *The Hentys* and *Men of Yesterday*. Brown and Bassett often attended seminars at Max Crawford's History Department at the University of Melbourne.

In 1940 Brown enlisted in the British army and served in anti-aircraft units in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns. His request to transfer to the AIF was delayed until 1944 when he served again as lieutenant in Australia and ultimately attended war crimes trials at Rabaul. In 1944 he married Jean (Janet) Howatson. After the war he

farmed cattle and sheep at Leopold, near Geelong, while continuing production of *Clyde Company Papers*.

A devout churchman, Brown was a member of the Melbourne Anglican Synod from 1960 to 1971. He was a founding councillor of the National Trust (Victoria) from 1956 to 1961 and was sometimes a front-line activist when buildings had to be saved. For seventeen years he was president of the Geelong Historical Society, leading it to a predominant position among Victorian local societies.

A key consultant in the early years of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, he contributed eighteen individualistic, witty entries on Victorian pioneers. Late in life he edited and published the journals of Foster Fyans and William Todd, and for the National Library introduced and annotated *The Challicum Sketch Book* of Duncan Elphinstone Cooper.

Brown was elected Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (1960) and Honorary Fellow of this Academy in 1973. Deakin University in 1981 conferred on him a DLitt, one of its first two honorary degrees.

Brown's upright stance and serious mien were slightly misleading for he was a merry man who delighted in the quirks of humankind. He was a poetry lover and enjoyed writing light verse, often using it in his writings. Whether answering requests for advice from scholars or schoolchildren, he went to infinite trouble in replying in dense pages of typing.

Brown died in Geelong on 29 September 1996. His wife, a son and a daughter survive him.

*Geoffrey Serle*