



Austin Gough
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Austin Gough (1926–1997)

The former colleagues, students and friends of Austin Gough, formerly Professor of History at the University of Adelaide, were grieved last September to hear of his sudden death far too early in his retirement. He was respected by all who knew him and loved by a legion of friends. He was survived by his wife Genevieve, his son Julian, and daughters Lisa and Harriet. Deeply interested in World War II to the benefit of generations of students, Austin was primarily an historian of nineteenth-century France who was greatly respected by French historians—a respect not casually bestowed on foreigners. An expert on the French church during the reign of Napoleon III, the regard in which he was held is demonstrated by the fact that his *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign 1846–1853*, originally published by Oxford University Press, was recently translated by a distinguished French scholar who was desperate to get a French version published for his students. While his speciality was the French church he had a passionate interest in the social life of nineteenth-century France, not least in its skilled artisans in their apprenticeships and journeyman experiences. His lectures on Zola were unforgettable. From 1993 to 1997 his publication of regular articles in the *Hobart Mercury*, *The Adelaide Review*, the *Australian* and elsewhere delighted appreciative readers and their unfashionable but urbane, humane, and witty conservatism stirred debate. However, many of those who enjoyed them will regret that they delayed completion of his long awaited study of the First Vatican Council of 1870 which promulgated the doctrine of Papal infallibility. It was to be based in part on a remarkable, little-known archive which he had discovered in Paris of letters from French society ladies, all fervent Gallicans, who had accompanied their priests to Rome to hold salons there and help sustain the fight against a doctrine they regarded as abominable—and whose priests betrayed their cause at the last. Both the subject and the capacity to ferret out unusual sources characterise the man. Quiet exuberance, fathomless curiosity, a deep affection for all that was eccentric, or perverse or idiosyncratic, or courageous or fallible in the humans, living or historical, who crossed his path informed and enriched his writing and his conversation. The latter will live long in the memory of those of us who were its beneficiaries.

Austin had a richly deserved reputation as a teacher. He was an inspirational teacher of undergraduates not only in lectures but also in the more difficult arena of the tutorial. As a supervisor of post-graduates he was unrivalled in his ability to persuade students that their work was important and their contribution significant, and in his extraordinary capacity to master the secondary sources for his students' research. (He considered self-indulgent or at least lacking in standards the notion that any historian can supervise any topic because he believed that all supervisors should know

more about the background literature of the topic than did the student.) On the eve of retirement he was awarded the Stephen Cole the Elder Prize for Excellency in Teaching. Students' testimonies to his qualities as a teacher are on file. Commented one: 'As a teacher he was not only interesting—he was interested'. You could hardly encapsulate Austin's virtues as a teacher in fewer words.

Austin had of course other strengths and other interests. Shortly after his appointment to Adelaide he was plunged into the headship of what was then the largest Adelaide University department (about 24 tenured members of staff). It was not a job which others coveted, and like most of us Austin was averse to the role but with guile, diligence, and charm he manoeuvred potentially hostile university committees so effectively that, although the university was already contracting its staff, the History Department mysteriously emerged from his stewardship with two additional tenured lecturers. His skills derived from a rich mix of experience. His was no simple progression from school to university to postgraduate degree to academic preferment. Educated at Xavier College, where he simultaneously embraced reading and rejected Catholicism, after military service late in the war he embarked aged 20 on a career as a newspaper editor first in Walgett, then in Coonamble, where his father had acquired the local newspapers. Characteristically, he enlivened the dull task of covering in relentless detail Saturday weddings or tedious council meetings by writing them in the style of his favourite authors: one week Henry James, next week Hemingway or Dickens or Jane Austen. In 1952 he joined the PMG department in Melbourne. Telephones were supposedly severely rationed and Austin was a close and delighted observer of much chicanery and corruption which extended as high as gentlemen who had been knighted for their services to communication by indulgent governments. It was in those years that, as a 'mature' student, he began to take part-time courses at Melbourne University and gradually transformed his life, winning the R G Wilson Prize for the best degree in history and being appointed as a lecturer and tutor before embarking with Genevieve for St Anthony's, Oxford, where he completed his DPhil. This was quickly followed by a permanent appointment at Warwick University, and then to a readership at Monash University. It was a meteoric rise and it was capped by his appointment to a professorship at Adelaide during 1970.

Other aspects of this many-sided man cannot be overlooked. He was a brilliant pianist, both classical and jazz, and had moonlighted in Melbourne nightclubs in his student days. He came from a musical family. A grandfather who conducted an orchestra at Geelong introduced Brahms to Australia. His aunt Teresa was a concert pianist; his mother was the staff accompanist at Dame Nellie Melba's opera school. Appropriately for somebody who was brought up in a house the garden of which covered part of the paddock where the 'Heidelberg school' had had their hut he was also

a keen student of art history and to visit a gallery in his company was a quietly memorable experience. Another passion was golf. It is sometimes said that he could have made his living as a golf professional but, although very talented, he was temperamentally unsuited to the pressure of professional golf. However, few professional golfers possess a swing which matches his remarkable combination of power, elegance, and rhythm. He had been good enough to play regularly with former Australian Open champion Ossie Pickworth and even in his sixties he had not lost his touch.

Students have testified to his urbanity, his charm, his wit and, above all, his humanity. That is also how his friends remember him and we always will.

Roger Hainsworth