



Max Crawford

## RAYMOND MAXWELL CRAWFORD

1906 - 1991

Max Crawford, a Foundation Fellow, died in Melbourne on 24 November 1991. He prefaced his 1939 'synoptic view' of *The Study of History* with Maitland's dictum that 'all history is but a seamless web'. It now furnishes a fitting epitaph to his achievement in transforming the study of history. Through his role while Professor of History at the University of Melbourne between 1937 and 1970, Crawford's stature in Australian intellectual history is secure. He elevated the contribution of history by his imaginative leadership in stimulating his staff and students to rewrite the past, and to assist positively in reshaping Australian national life and culture.

Raymond Maxwell Crawford was born at Grenfell, NSW, on 6 August 1906, the ninth of twelve children of a self-improving coalminer and railwayman and his resourceful wife. Max reflected upon family circumstances when describing 'my brother Jack' (Sir John, the distinguished economist), and recalled that, during their youth, 'we were familiar with thrift, but did not know hardship'. The Presbyterian ambience of their home, where 'the Church was our club', ensured that, in their maturity, although church doctrine might be discarded, 'its values were ingrained'. Crawford's gentle, gracious, but forthright character, his interest in civil liberties, his eloquence, and his vision of the moral value of history, probably owed much to those influences.

Educated at Sydney Boys' High School and the University of Sydney, Crawford proceeded to Balliol College on a scholarship. He emerged with a deep appreciation of literature and he proved an adept painter, so that his later university interests spanned these disciplines by facilitating combined honours courses involving History, and English, Fine Art or Philosophy, respectively. Oxford University, especially Balliol, profoundly influenced Crawford, and consequently his Melbourne department. Graduates voyaged there on various scholarships, which they owed largely to Crawford's intercession. Over a few years following the war, Oxford-bound History or combined honours graduates included J.S. Bastin, C.L. Burns, Z. Cowen, F.K. Crowley, J.A. Gobbo, S.L. Goldberg, M.C. Groves, K.S. Inglis, J.D. Legge, A.M. McBriar, J.A.C. Mackie, J.M. Main, O.W. Parnaby, J.R. Poynter, A.G. Serle, and C.M. Williams.

After secondary school teaching in England and New South Wales and spending 1932 at Balliol, Crawford was appointed to a University of Sydney lectureship in 1935, until

he succeeded Sir Ernest Scott at Melbourne. Despite wartime dislocation and his service in Russia between 1942 and 1944, as First Secretary to the Australian legation, Crawford's publications demonstrated the breadth of his historical concerns and his concept of humane education. *The Study of History* (1939) announced his interest in the theory and practice of historical research and explanation, a philosophical concern which then distinguished his department from others. *Ourselves and the Pacific* (1941) was timed impeccably to focus attention on Australia's neighbours in the year of Pearl Harbour. Generations of secondary school students used that text in its successive editions. *The Renaissance and Other Essays* (1945) reflected his abiding interest in the Italian city states and Machiavelli's political philosophy.

While Crawford is known chiefly as a Renaissance scholar, it is evident that he believed in the contemporary relevance of the past, particularly the significance of understanding Australia's past. His *Australia* (1952) was the first of the spate of post-war single volume perspectives. Even his major biography of his former Sydney professor, George Arnold Wood, traversed moral issues, civil liberty and intolerance within Australian society. He personally experienced intolerance as vice-president of the Australian Council for Civil Liberties 1938-1945, and on the executive of the Australia-Soviet Friendship League. He was named in parliament as a 'pink' professor (possibly the type specimen of that cold war species).

Crawford fostered a department adapted to welcome the post-war student influx and to meet its many strains. He possessed a flair for selecting lecturers for innovative courses, then boosting their confidence by allowing them to teach untrammelled by bureaucratic controls or time-consuming committees. Probably every departmental post between 1937 and 1958 was filled simply by his courteous invitation rather than by advertisement. Such benevolent despotism is anathema today; yet Crawford's regime proved efficient and students were stimulated and challenged, surely the central objective of tertiary education.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's Tudor-Stuart Britain is writ large upon the memory of generations of students, for whom Civil War issues possessed contemporary meaning; Manning Clark's reputation was established once he became entrusted with teaching Australian History; Norman Harper taught differently, but his American history course was a pioneering and significant venture; John O'Brien, whose incisive Ancient History course actually provided a unique exercise in source interpretation and logic, developed after Crawford enticed him from teaching classics to replace a staff member who had died

suddenly; Crawford's own theory and method unit had no parallel in Australia.

Unusual for historical practice over four decades ago, Crawford believed in field research. He participated in a memorable 'archaeological' excursion to Phillip Island in 1947. That same year he visited the Kimberleys intending to pursue historical research, but it was there that he discovered Aboriginal society. That influence is reflected in the opening chapter of *Australia*. He also encouraged the anthropologist, Donald Thomson, to produce his significant memoir, *The Ceremonial Exchange Cycle in Arnhem Land* (1949). He created a post for the German refugee, Leonhard Adam, and materially assisted Adam to revise his Pelican book, *Primitive Art* (1948). However, despite Crawford's efforts, anthropology failed to take root in the Faculty. Within his own department from 1957, however, Pacific Prehistory offered the first Australian course in this region's pre-European past.

It was the manner in which courses were taught, as much as their substance, which bore Crawford's hallmark, although he inherited some features from Scott. Years before most universities adopted tutorials, the weekly class tutorial formed a basic component of all courses. Student essays (pass level included) were returned to students at individual interviews, the stress upon the scholarly apparatus in essays being matched by an emphasis upon logical explanation and literary style.

Crawford twice proved an able Faculty Dean, but he also participated in administrative activities beyond the campus. He wrote an important report for the Martin Committee on Tertiary Education, and played a significant role in the creation of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, particularly within the small drafting party which was architect of the 1964 Act.

The Academy owes much to Crawford's initiative. A Foundation fellow of the Australian Humanities Research Council between 1965 and 1968, he chaired that Council while the Charter and other administrative and legal actions were undertaken. He then handed a viable Academy to the first President, Sir Keith Hancock. Within recent years Crawford made the most generous donation to Academy funds received so far. As a consequence and with his approval, council has struck the Max Crawford Medal, and is inaugurating the Sir Keith Hancock Lecture. The Academy provides a statistical index to Max Crawford's continuing intellectual influence. Probably twenty-one Fellows in 1991 were graduates of his department during his tenure, while nineteen Fellows of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia also were graduates (of whom eight are Fellows of both Academics).

Crawford played a key role in establishing and maintaining *Historical Studies*, and his former students dedicated a 1971 number to his achievements. His public recognition was less than his due. He was awarded an O.B.E. in 1971, and his university conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, in 1988. Always a private person, he shared his retirement with his wife in their Ivanhoe riverside retreat. Dogged by ill-health and impaired vision, he had to abandon his hobby of painting. He turned to writing poetry as a substitute for close documentary reading. It is appropriate that his former department is publishing a volume of his poems.

In a paper read before the 1964 meeting of the Australian Humanities Research Council, Crawford stated his educational vision. 'Excellence', he proclaimed, 'is the word to which all else is subordinate - excellence in teaching, excellence in transmitting acquired knowledge and understanding, in critically assessing it, in adding to it'.

*John Mulvaney*