

## PAUL FRANCIS BOURKE

6 July 1938 — 7 June 1999

Paul Bourke was so alive, in everything he did, that his untimely death is almost incomprehensible: he, more than most academics, had it in him to be the Grand, or at least Wise, Old Man of the next generation. No-one else can fill the role that might have been his.

He was early marked out for distinction as a historian, but he was much else: someone who was good at running things, at making things work, at enlivening a community, at asking inconvenient questions, at presiding, as he did so well in this Academy and earlier in the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU. He loved the texture of institutions, especially universities, and he was made for them.

Paul was a most distinguished product of Max Crawford's history school at the University of Melbourne, and went from there not to Oxford or Cambridge but to Madison, Wisconsin, USA, where he was one of the first Australian historians to obtain doctoral training in the American style. He repaid his mentors with a truly great book, which has gained the supreme academic accolade of a dedicated conference.

From Flinders University, where he served as Professor of American Studies and as Pro Vice-Chancellor, he went to the ANU to serve as the Director of the RSSS, at an important time in the University's history. When he stepped down it was only in part to return to scholarship. He found himself serving in a range of senior posts within the University, and widening his research interests to include the evaluation of research work itself, a matter that has become of considerable importance. Along the way, so to speak, he served as the President of this Academy, once again at an important time, and it is to his endeavours that we owe, among other things, the National Academies Forum.

Four facets of Paul Bourke come easily to my mind. The first is scholarship. In 1981 I was the junior member of an Australian Research Grants Committee panel for the humanities and economics. We were at Flinders University in Adelaide, and I had been a bit depressed with what I had seen and heard through the applications process already in Sydney and Melbourne. Gus Sinclair, who was a senior member, asked if I knew Paul Bourke. 'No,' I said. 'Well,' said Gus, 'I think you'll like this one.'

And I did. Paul Bourke was the ideal grant applicant. He was well read and well prepared. But much more: he was enthusiastic about what he and Donald deBats had done and were doing — the work which was to result in his magnum opus — and he aroused our own enthusiasm, because he could show us all why the work was important not only to his own field of History, but to the social sciences more generally.

A few years later he came to RSSS, and there I got to know him well. I learned about his short fuse, his Irish preparedness to fight and readiness to forget, his capacity to sing, his breadth of learning, and his breadth of interest in and respect for what others do. He is the only man who has ever shouted at me since I became an adult, and he is also the only man to whom I ever have shouted back. Not so long ago, when he and I recalled the incident, neither of us could remember what the shouting had been about. That too was characteristic of him. He was a good Director in all sorts of ways, and he went on to give a lot more to the University, at the expense of his own work and fame.

At the end of 1987 I left the University to do other things. But I still saw a lot of Paul. We were near neighbours for some years, which helped. We now also became sparring partners in what is a continuing debate about the shape of higher education. What is to become of the university as we know it, is a matter on which all of us legitimately have a point of view. Mine, shaped in part by my experiences as a senior officer at the ANU and a member of a number of Government committees interested in the question, was, is and is likely to continue to be, a reform perspective. Paul's, shaped by his experiences, was for the preservation of what he saw as the best, of excellence. Some points of view, of course, we shared. But on several occasions we found ourselves on opposite sides of the debate in public places. There was no shouting there. Each of us greatly respected the other, and by now there was a warm personal bond of friendship as well. He was an admirable and effective spokesman for his perspective, and Australia is the poorer for his passing.

Finally, he and I had a common interest and facility in counting, which is relatively uncommon in the discipline of History from which we both had come, and that led in his case to a competence of a high order in the relatively new field of the measurement of research performance. He began to take up this line of work in the interest of the School and of the University, but it broadened in time to the point where what he did was taken seriously by experts in other countries. Since performance measurement has been an interest of mine for some years I can say that his work was careful, comprehensive and useful. Much of what passes for performance measurement in our academic world is entitled to none of those adjectives. Again, I lament the passing of someone who was adding to our knowledge, in a fundamental way, of what it is we do and why it is important to our country and to humanity generally.

Along with Don Rawson, whom I knew for 40 years, and who worked closely with Paul as Associate Director of the School, and Fred Gruen, another colleague in RSSS — both, like Paul, Fellows of our Academy — Paul was an academic with whom I felt a very close bond intellectually and emotionally, so his death is a profound personal loss. But when I look at what he did, and how many he lives he touched, I am so glad that he was there, and that what he did was so very good.