



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

21 JANUARY 1988

LAUNCH OF
"PENGUIN BICENTENNIAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA"
SYDNEY - 21 JANUARY 1988

Mr Kirk, Professor Molony, Manning Clark, Distinguished
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

There could hardly be a more appropriate - indeed symbolic -
setting from which to launch the "Penguin Bicentennial
History of Australia".

Two hundred years ago, the eleven ships of the First Fleet
sailed into this Harbour to found the first European
settlement in Australia.

In a few days time, we will be reminded of that event when
the ships of the First Fleet Reenactment Voyage enter the
Harbour and later the Tall Ships sail past in a magnificent
parade of sail.

These activities, of course, represent the more spectacular
side of the Bicentenary celebrations.

But I try to emphasise, at all times, that the celebrations
themselves represent only a part of the purpose and
significance of the Bicentenary.

And one of its most important aspects is the opportunity the
Bicentenary gives us to learn more about the past.

But, even more important than that - the opportunity it gives
us to learn from the past.

The Australian Bicentennial Authority has been very much
aware of its responsibilities in this regard.

The "Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia" complements
three other landmark publications commissioned by the
Australian Bicentennial Authority. They are:

- "After 200 Years", a photographic inventory of the
diversity of Aboriginal life in the 1980s co-ordinated by
the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies;

004006

- "Generations", by Professor Diane Bell; and
- "The Australopedia", a children's encyclopedia edited by Dr Joan Grant.

But, of course, these commissioned publications form only a part of the massive work by Australian writers, historians and publishers in connection with the Bicentenary.

For example, the monumental 10-volume "Australians", published by Fairfax-Syme-Weldon - a work of its kind unsurpassed in the world.

But today I want to draw your attention to a point of fundamental importance.

Even before it officially begins, the Bicentenary is fulfilling a purpose of deep significance for the future.

All the writers and historians who have been involved in these projects have tried to take a fresh look at the past - from new perspectives, based on new insights and new knowledge.

And in particular, this approach is leading to an altogether new assessment of the pre-European era; and, specifically, of the development of the Aboriginal culture over 40,000 years.

And that reassessment cannot fail to lead to a reassessment on the part of all Australians, of the role of the Aborigines and our relationship with them - not only in the past, but now; and above all, in the future.

And I deeply believe that this will prove to be one of the most valuable and enduring fruits of the Bicentenary.

The reassessment would undoubtedly have come.

It had to come.

But I think it is clear that the Bicentenary has provided the focus for it - indeed the catalyst for it.

Professor Molony's work will be part of that process.

As its subtitle suggests - "The Story of 200 Years" - it is largely a story of European settlement.

Even so, I note that by far the largest single entry in the index refers to Aborigines.

I suggest that no previous general history of modern Australia contains that emphasis.

Manning Clark himself has acknowledged that his own work is deficient in this respect and that he would do it differently, if he were doing it now.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I congratulate the Bicentennial Authority for including works of history and sociology in its program.

I hasten to point out that the commission was awarded to Penguin long before I gave the Publishing Editor-designate special ministerial responsibility for the Bicentennial.

You will be familiar with the line that "the views of the speaker are not necessarily those of this station". I must for the sake of my own integrity say that the views of the author, not as historian but as current affairs commentator in the latter pages, are not necessarily those of the launcher.

However, let me leave the author with the last word, with which I do entirely concur.

He concludes:

"Some will say that the history of Australia since 26 January 1788 is no cause for thanksgiving. They are heard and respected, but they are wrong."