

CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC HISTORY
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Australian
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University

Friends of the ANU Centre for Economic History,

Welcome to this issue of the CEH newsletter. It includes a reminder of featured events at the upcoming APEBH conference as well as reports on conferences on the Federation of Australia and on Economic Knowledge and the Australian State. Also in this issue, an obituary for former ANU economic historian Alan Hall. Once again, thanks for your interest in the Centre for Economic History.

Tim Hatton, CEH Director

Events at the APEBH Conference, February 13-15

The Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History (APEBH) Conference will be held at the Australian National University on February 13-15, 2020. The theme of the conference is ***Colonisation and Indigenous Populations***. The full programme of academic papers and sessions plus other events can be viewed here: <https://apebh2020.wordpress.com/program-2/>.

Conference events:

A *Plenary Lecture* will be given by Professor Richard Steckel (Ohio State University) on the evening of the 12th February. Title: "Very Long-term Trends in Health on Four Continents: North America, South America, Europe and Asia"

A *Book Launch* of: *Historical Perspectives on Sports Economics*, edited by Richard Pomfret and John Wilson. This will take place in the evening on the 13th February at the Harry Hartog Bookstore on the ANU campus, followed by a cocktail reception.

The Keynote *Noel Butlin Lecture* will be given by Professor Deborah Oxley (University of Oxford), on the evening of the 14th February. The theme will be: "The Impact of Colonization on Indigenous Populations." This will be followed by:

Conference Dinner, on the evening of the 14th February.

Conference website:

Registration for the conference is now open. Full details, including directions to the venue and information on accommodation, are on the conference website at:

<https://apebh2020.wordpress.com/>

Conference Report:

Demythologising Australia's Federation Episode

The conference, organized by William Coleman (ANU) and Greg Moore (Notre Dame), took place, with the liberal assistance of the Mankall Foundation on Friday 22 November 2019 at the Fremantle campus of the University of Notre Dame, Australia. Economic and political historians gathered to re-examine the conventional wisdom concerning the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

William Coleman opened the conference by articulating what might be described as the maximum-skeptic position. Whereas conventional history presumes Federation was a fitting and 'natural' thing, animated by elevated sentiments of brotherhood and patriotism, and proceeding by way of democratic process, Coleman argued it was almost gratuitous, acutely contingent, and driven by the status hunger of an elite, which manipulated a process which was only thinly democratic.



William Coleman in maximum-skeptic mode

Peter Phelps challenged the judgement of Federation as gratuitous by tracing the revival of Federationism to a surge in defence anxieties. True, defence scares had recurred each decade back to the 1850s. But, as Phelps pointed out, the defence concerns of the Federation period had two novelties; a continental consciousness in thinking about defence problems, and a context of racial angst. The last unease was not confined to journalists; the Yellow Wave, an 1895 novel Phelps instanced, was authored by Kenneth MacKay, an officer in NSW defence forces, a senior member of NSW Protectionist party, and active Federationist. In the discussion of Phelps' paper, it was noted that German New Guinea was strangely absent from Federation debates. Is that evidence that defence did not, in fact, feature in the minds of Federationists? Or was it that a German New Guinea did not tug at racial anxieties?

Demythologising Australia's Federation, continued

The topic of defence was in some degree complemented by Henry Ergas' tracing the development of nationalist theorizing from the early modern Europe until the birth of the Commonwealth. Ergas stressed that this development was parasitic on the prior development in the 17th century of the theory of the state, especially the tenet that sovereignty was a matter of geography. That begged the question, what rightly determined the geographical boundaries of the state? Nationalism was one answer to the question begged; boundaries should be based on nationality. This answer still allowed great space for different types of nationalism. A Jacksonian, 'populist' nationalism would be concerned to purify the nation state of those persons of the 'wrong' nationality.

By contrast, a separatist nationalism, typical of minorities in land empires, would seek to carve out a state for a submerged nationality. Majorities in land empires might attempt some Jacksonian nationalism themselves; thus Russification under the Tsar. But a program of Britishification in the British Empire would have been preposterous. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of the Empire into two parts—into an 'Empire of Britons' distinct from a 'Britain's Empire'—could in some measure serve the nationalist program of aligning borders with nationality, and indeed, cohere with a quasi-Jacksonian program to divest the 'Empire of Britons' of non-Britons. Almost all Federationists subscribed to that conceptualisation and program, underlining that Commonwealth was not a piece of separatist nationalism.

The responsibility of the British cultural inheritance for the poverty of the Federationists' conceptions of Federalism was stressed by Greg Melleuish. The overwhelming British example of 'responsible government' – where the executive serves at the pleasure of the (dominant) first chamber of a legislature - obscured to Federationists the problematic character of such a doctrine in any federal system with a powerful senate. The British inheritance had not been so blindsiding of the US constitution-makers of 1787, as they did not attempt to create a system of 'responsible government'; for the good reason that 18th century Britain did not have it.

The faintness of Australian federal spirit was put into strong relief by Richard Pomfret. He ventured that the balance in Canada between federal power and that of provinces, had changed little since 1867, in acute contrast to Australia. He underlined this by the fact that the Canadian supreme court has not been aggressively centralising, unlike the Australian High Court. He wondered if, somewhat paradoxically, the fact that the Canadian Senate is not a 'states house' was strengthening of federation, as the task of representing the provinces was left to their premiers. Better real premiers than a bogus states' house.

Zach Gorman's paper stressed the significance of the Senate in inciting opposition to Federation, as it was the Senate's gross violation of 'one vote one value' that most provoked Labor opposition. This opposition was buttressed by "Australia as it is" conservatives, and this unwonted conjunction of conservative and radical produced a No majority in Sydney in the referenda of 1898 and 1899.

The conference concluded with a discussion of the malaise of contemporary federalism in Australia, that closed with the thought that Australia's federal system amounts to a system of the executive at every level of government—including the federal level—jettisoning its responsibilities on to others. ---WC

Conference Report: Data and its Discontents

44th Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association

Chicago's historic Palmer House hosted the 2019 Annual Meeting of social scientists engaged in historical issues from around the world. Two blocks away from Michigan Avenue the hotel is in a prime location to showcase the best that Chicago has to offer. However, with a program packed with the latest in a diverse range of topics there was little time left for exploring the surroundings (although this correspondent did manage to squeeze in a viewing of Hamilton).

Economic history topics covered a broad range of issues such as language and media, replication in interdisciplinary scholarship, problems with data and measurement, data from planned economies, the measurement of living standards, a history of the labour force, family demography, health, workload and violence in Europe, a culture of growth in Europe, the economic legacy of slavery, data linkage, quantifying the impacts of regulation, textual analysis, 800 years of political and economic change in Hawai'i, patent data, political economy in China, and finance money and banking.

Outgoing president Steven Ruggles gave an inspired address titled "The Revival of Quantification". Given Ruggles' role in the development of IPUMS it seems only fitting that his talk would focus on the quantification of History over the twentieth century in the United States. Ruggles breaks his study into 3 time periods: The Older New History, The Newer New Histories and The Revival of Quantification. The talk began with a discussion of the Older New History, a period characterised by the likes of James Harvey Robinson, Mary Beard and Carl Becker. This group held that past events are intrinsically unknowable, history is an imaginative reconstruction of vanished events, and that in the reconstruction of vanished events the historian is conditioned by the "specious present". From the 1890s until the



Early Christmas presence: Johan Fourie, Martine Mariotti and Katherine Eriksson

early 1930s the percent of articles with statistical tables in the American Historical Review increased to peak around 15 % before declining again from the mid-1930s until well into the 1950s.

The Cold War consensus that gained ground immediately following the Second World War contrasted with the Older Newer History, arguing that history is indeed objective and therefore that there is less need for quantification. The establishment reacted strongly to the advance of quantification with Carl Bridenbaugh in his 1962 presidential address to the American Historical Association warning his fellow historians not to "worship at the shrine of that bitch-goddess, QUANTIFICATION" (<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/carl-bridenbaugh>). Nevertheless, in 1964 the American Historical Association did establish a short-lived Committee on Quantitative Data in History. –*contd.* p. 5.

Two Glittering Prizes . . .

Congratulations go to Aditya Balasubramanian (ANU) who won the Ellen McArthur prize for his Cambridge PhD dissertation. The prize is awarded “for any work on Economic History...by any graduate of the University or by any person who is registered as a graduate student in the University.” Aditya’s thesis is entitled “Free Economy and Opposition Politics in India, c. 1940-70.” It is a history of economic ideas about the rise and fall of India’s Swatantra Party between 1940 and 1970. Reframing the history of economic thought around politicians and publicists from landed and mercantile communities in southern and western parts of the country, it presents an alternative history of the political Right in India.

Congratulations also to Selwyn Cornish and Raghendra Jha (both ANU) who were awarded the Peter Groenewegen prize for the best paper in the *History of Economics Review*. The bi-annual prize was for their article “Trevor Swan and Indian Planning: The Lessons of 1958/59.” Trevor Swan was the founding professor of economics at the ANU where he worked from 1950 until his retirement in 1983. He pioneered the theory of economic growth (the Solow-Swan model) and made important contributions in macroeconomic theory, notably on modelling fiscal policy and the balance of payments. Swan was one of a delegation of distinguished economic advisors who visited India in 1958/9. Using archival records Cornish and Jha show that Swan was skeptical about the (third) Five Year Plan that he had been invited to contribute to. His criticisms of the regime of central planning and state control were largely ignored but were vindicated in the light of India’s subsequent economic performance.

Data and its Discontents contd.

The Second Boom in Historical Statistics began in the late 1960s but again wasn’t universally welcomed across the historical journals. This led to the formation of the Social Sciences History Association in 1974. The second boom was driven by the New Economic History, New Political History and the New Social History. The New Economic History was first on the scene, followed by the Political history and then during the 1980s a surge in New Social History. Political historian Lee Benson played a large role in the move to a more quantitative approach by denouncing the historical research of the time as being “proof by haphazard quotation”. Nevertheless, in the historical journals, there was a decline in the percentage of articles with a statistical graph or table from the late 1980s to be replaced with an increase in the New Cultural History.

Ruggles noted that we are in the midst of a quantitative revival since 2009 in the *American Historical Review* and across the four main historical journals. This revival can be seen in the top political science, demography, sociology journals as well and, of course, in the top Economics journals.

Why is this happening? Technology, a data explosion, not least driven by IPUMS, and increases in online machine readable forms of archive records are part of the supply reason. Legitimacy of science, the disappearing stigma of quantification, and global uncertainty highlighting the need for measurement are part of the demand reason. Ruggles argued for interdisciplinary collaboration and to that end invited participants to the Red Lacquer Room for the presidential reception. –MM.

Conference Report: Economic Knowledge and the Australian State: Past, Present, Future

The conference, convened by Nicholas Brown (ANU), Ben Huff (Sydney) and Yves Rees (La Trobe), took place at the ANU on 12th and 13th December 2019. Supported by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the ANU's Research School of Economics and the School of History, it sought to investigate the status of economic knowledge in Australian statecraft from the perspective of the broader trajectory of Australian policy history over the past thirty or so years. We have had a range of formulations regarding the imperatives of competition 'reform', the 'capture' of government by market liberalism, an erosion of the capacities of core institutions to counter political populism, the financialisation of core relationships in the lead up to the Global Financial Crisis, and continuing in the 'great backwash' since then.

Our focus was instead to frame ways in which we might move beyond such descriptions to offer a closer explanation not so much of the capacity of economic knowledge to solve policy problems, but to shape the terms in which such problems have been defined and the resources identified and engaged to address them. Specifically, we sought to address the question: 'in what ways has economic knowledge and expertise been instituted over time in Australian governmental practice, in the forms of bureaucracy, policies, laws, programs, and governance?' Our particular attention to the state built on the 'paradox' identified by Bob Jessop: 'continually called upon by diverse social forces to resolve society's problems, [the state] ... is equally continually doomed to generate 'state failure' since so many of society's problems lie well beyond its control'.



Prime Ministers Bob Hawke (PM 1983-1991) and Paul Keating
(PM 1991-1996)

In refining our program, the convenors' intention was to test approaches, concepts and themes that might warrant closer attention in future discussion. Invited speakers reflected expertise in several disciplines, at all career stages, and experience in a range of state and non-state institutions (including the Productivity Commission, the Grattan Institute, the

Australian Council of Social Services, and the Australian parliament) as well as from several universities. There were three 'keynote' presentations, with Mark Wright (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis) and Glenda Sluga (University of Sydney) opening the program with an international framing of issues, and Deborah Cobb-Clark (University of Sydney) concluding our first day with reflections on questions still to be resolved as the increasing capacity to marshal data on disadvantage (for example) meets the ethics of intervention and the reach of policy.

Economic Knowledge and the Australian State contd.

Over the two days, papers covered issues ranging from wages policy, inflation targeting, taxation, superannuation and migration through to regionalism, superannuation, climate change, education, international trade and development and the tension between economic and rights-based agendas in indigenous policy and experience. If there was – as several speakers noted – an increasing tendency for economists to define the discipline in terms of ‘data science’, there was also a need to reflect on the scalar, spatial, distributional and territorial dimensions of such data, and on the extent to which social and political relationships – and associated ‘opportunity costs’ – were being either subsumed in, or excluded from, such data.

In general, what emerged from our program accorded with the doctrinal, institutional and historical matrix Robert Skidelsky has recently revived from the work of T.W. Hutchison. Of these three ‘curves’, the last two (perhaps surprisingly) emerged from the workshop as warranting closest attention. While the ‘doctrinal’ shifts associated with the ‘end of Keynesianism’ (for example) are familiar enough in economic history, a full, sustained and integrated institutional and historical perspective on the preconditions and consequences of those processes is still needed. As a quick poll at the end of the workshop revealed, fundamental questions regarding the transparency and accountability of institutions associated with such transitions still need to be addressed, as does an historical assessment of the changing forms of a civil society capable of making such demands.

At many points, workshop participants (including discussants and members of the public) expressed concern that our papers and questions kept tending towards a rather despairing sense of ‘the world we have lost’. Equally, there was a concern that we still don’t really understand – in a consolidated way – the main drivers for these transitions over the past thirty years. The convenors of the workshop are taking stock of these issues in considering the most effective way to publish the proceedings, and, in reporting back to ASSA, to recommend how the issues raised should be pursued further.--NB

Centre for Economic History Discussion Paper Series

The CEH website hosts a discussion paper series on a variety of topics in economic history. Recent additions include the following:

2019-10 “Intergenerational Mobility in American History: Accounting for Race and Measurement Error,” by Zachary Ward

Centre affiliates and visitors are encouraged to submit working papers to the series. All papers are available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/s/auu/hpaper.html>

CEH news and working papers at: <https://www.rse.anu.edu.au/research/centres-projects/centre-for-economic-history/>

The CEH welcomes courtesy announcements from affiliates and interested parties for inclusion in our newsletter (subject to editing). Please send news items to: CEH.RSE@anu.edu.au

All CEH affiliates who are registered with RePEc are invited to add the Centre as an affiliation on IDEAS: <https://edirc.repec.org/data/cpanuau.html>

In Memoriam: Alan Hall

Dr. Alan Hall passed away on October 24, 2019. Alan was a stalwart of the Australian economic history school at the Australian National University. His first published paper appeared in the *Economic Record* in December 1950 and he was still publishing, in *Economic Papers*, in December 2018. Two further papers, on GDP measurement and on the work of Trevor Swan, were in train. This meant a span of seven decades in scholarship.

While his doctorate was completed at London, Alan was an early appointee to the newly established Australia National University in Canberra, where he worked for much of his academic life. He published in international journals such as *Economica* and the *Economic History Review* from time to time, but his mind was steadfastly grounded in Australia.

His focus was the evolution of the economy of Australia since British settlement. Links with Britain through trade and finance were much examined, but the narrative was that of Australia across both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He much admired ANU foundation economics professor, Trevor Swan, and drew on the theory insights provided by long conversations with Swan. He also worked closely with the Butlin brothers, Sidney and Noel. With Sid, at Sydney University, Alan shared a fascination with banking and finance. He wrote book-length histories: *Australian Company Finance 1946-1955*; *The London Capital Market and Australia 1870-1914*; and *The Stock Exchange of Melbourne and the Victorian Economy 1852-1900*. Sid and Alan produced jointly (with Bob White) *Australian Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1817-1945*.

With Noel Butlin, his ANU colleague, he looked more at the “real” economy, covering population, GDP, industrial production, employment, exports and imports. This reflected the Keynesian ethos of the time and the Australian interest in historical national accounts, as reflected in earlier names such as Timothy Coghlan and Colin Clark. To these he brought a skeptical eye, being an assiduous critic of little questioned methods of statistical compilation. His final works argued strongly that systematic mis-measurement of GDP in national accounts was failing good policy.

A like concern over the limits to conventional economic accounting was reflected in his long-standing commitment to environmental protection and appreciation, well ahead of the modern ecological sustainability movement. He was a champion of bush regeneration, in theory and in much admired community practice.

Analysts today can learn much from Alan’s legacy. It conveys the importance of national narrative, now lost amidst a rather unbalanced global liberal order and a meretricious modern social media. And it conveys the importance of the punctilious compilation of the evidentiary base for this story, rather than reliance solely on advanced econometrics with feet of clay.

Equally, Alan would respect the resurgence of economic historian skills in business schools in business and comparative history, but bemoan their erosion in core social science and humanities in Australia and urge their incorporation in environmental studies.

He would want economic historians to “walk on two legs”: to talk and count. How better to seize the day in an era of big data and give it some coherence than to learn these lessons? ---GW

Two views of the Federal Parliament, Canberra



Shrouded by smoke haze from the bushfires in New South Wales (Channel 9)



On a (normal) summer day (HomePlans)