

REVIEW ARTICLE : 'A MOTLEY BAND OF QUEENSLAND WARRIORS'

Roger Scott

This overview continues the series of book reports on this year's contributions to Queensland politics and history.

Warrior – A legendary leader's dramatic life and violent death on the colonial frontier¹

Pride of place for the year (perhaps any year) must be given to Libby Connors' *Warrior – A legendary leader's dramatic life and violent death on the colonial frontier*, published by Allen and Unwin.

This reminds us of the complex relationships which existed within the groupings of indigenous inhabitants in south-eastern Queensland and the diversity of interests and attitudes among the various European interlopers, overlaid by the ambiguous role played by the various colonial authorities.

Among the many honours heaped on this book was its inclusion at the top of the list identified by the Grattan Institute as recommended summer reading for the Prime Minister.² As the author is a Research Associate of the Foundation, it is more appropriate to record what the Grattan Institute had to say:

The squatters, station hands, missionaries, convicts and police officers who settled in and around Brisbane in the first half of the 19th century brought British law to an empty land that had no laws. Or so the official story went.

In truth, a complex society existed before Europeans arrived, and it continued to exist alongside the new colony. The actions of the indigenous inhabitants were dictated by their laws, culture, politics and economy. The Europeans living in the area were affected in many ways, but they little understood the aborigines' motives.

Warrior illuminates the conflict between British and indigenous laws and retributions through a thoroughly researched recreation of the story of Dundalli, a warrior and lawman whose physical strength, charisma and negotiating skills made him an inspirational leader. Respected by indigenous people, he was feared and demonised by the white settlers (and especially the *Moreton Bay Courier*).

Connors shows how what is now called Brisbane had an early history that would now be called war. And the fog of war was particularly thick when neither side understood the basic assumptions or the internal politics of the other. The incomprehension grew as the conflict travelled from the frontier towards the courts and institutions at the centre of each culture where norms of criminal law were used to judge the actions of soldiers.

Australia's journey towards reconciliation needs a better understanding of the indigenous nations and the colonial wars that were fought on the frontiers. Telling stories such as Dundalli's will help all Australians develop the mutual understanding and respect that were missing from the early nineteenth century, and are needed for national unity today.

Two other books, about different kinds of warriors, have ended up on my book shelf.

¹ See the Allen and Unwin site listing: <https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/general-books/history/Warrior-Libby-Connors-9781760110482>

² See the list of recommended reading at: <http://grattan.edu.au/report/summer-reading-list-for-the-prime-minister-2015/>

Joh for PM³

The first arises from my continuing interest in the vicissitudes of the non-Labor side of Queensland politics, which stretches back to my arrival in Queensland in 1977 and my wife's subsequent choice of doing a doctorate on a 1981 Parliamentary Select Committee on Education which reflected some of the tensions within that political category.

Paul Davey was National Party federal director for nearly ten years, held other partisan posts in NSW and Canberra and he writes here about the most turbulent event he experienced, the Joh for PM campaign. He has already published extensively on the party politics of both New South Wales and nationally. This book is an outcome of a period spent at the Page Research Centre, named after Sir Earle Page, which gives public access to a massive collection of print and audio-visual resources.

Davey draws on his experience as a journalist to generate a clear narrative account of the time when relationships broke down between Joh's Queensland Nationals and the national organisation, a break-down which effectively cost the coalition an election at national level and damaged its prospects at others. In its later chapters – especially one entitled 'the eye of the storm' – there is a revelatory discussion of an equally momentous break-down in the relationship between Joh and Sir Robert Sparkes, the major intellectual force within the party machine.

This is a book about the national scene and the destructive force caused by Joh's flight of fancy that he could export his brand of Queensland populism, already in decline locally, onto the national scene. It adds some detailed flesh and bones to information already discussed by others from a more parochial perspective, but it does not set out to offer any theoretical insights and says little about the local insurrection which removed Joh from office. It was surprising to find detailed references to David Russell, including his startling interview for the University of Queensland oral history project *Queensland Speaks*⁴, but no interview or other contribution from Mike Ahern.

As a publication, it is exemplary as a product of a university press (UNSW) with all the apparatus of notes, bibliography and index. This is becoming a rarity, facilitated perhaps by the Page Research Centre's funding support.

Boots and All : Terry Hampson AM⁵

By contrast, the record of the third 'warrior' had to be done the hard way, through private publication by the author. Given this limitation, it is a remarkably professional product with a family album of photographic illustrations, an index and faultless editing.

Terry Hampson was a true warrior on two battlefields – one, fighting Joh and his successors on the environmental front, especially over Fraser Island in alliance with John Sinclair; the other, fighting for a range of progressive causes and for mass membership engagement against conservatism within the ALP. The two causes intersected over the future of Fraser Island being resisted by unions concerned about

³ Paul Davey, *Joh for PM*, NewSouth Books, UNSW, Sydney, 2015.

⁴ *Queensland Speaks* website is at: <http://www.queenslandspeaks.com.au>

⁵ Fran Ross, *Boots and All : Terry Hampson AM*, self-published : 29 Hornibrook Avenue, Fitzgibbon, Queensland 4008, 2015.

job losses associated with the cessation of logging which flowed from changes in the island's status.

Unlike Davey's smooth narrative and diffidence, this is a gritty book full of gems and sharp edges and personal commitment on the part of the author. It is full of conversations and interviews and unofficial documents which add immense depth to the public record, particularly the factional disputation and dissembling and even treachery which seemed part of the life of the ALP both before and after the arrival of Wayne Goss to power in 1989.

The author is able to show that Hampson was a vivid personality with a high level of charm and intelligence, uncomplicated by the personal ambition which clouded the virtue of those around him.

The only other knight in untarnished armour, John Sinclair of the Fraser Island Defence Organisation, presided over the book launch on November 29 which served (again, like Michael O'Neill) as a wake for the memory of the subject of the book who had died between the ending of the writing and the emergence of the book. The packed Chermside drill hall was filled with an array of ALP figures from current and past governments and the core of supporters who had served as foot-soldiers in various campaigns under Hampson's strategic direction.

The location was at the Chermside Historical Precinct which was a memorial itself to Hampson's last decade of political activity, in local government, after what the author described as 'the intense years, 1980-1991'. This was the high point when he was at the very centre of ALP state politics and a key player in the small reform group (along with Denis Murphy and Peter Beattie) which created the organisational climate for the election of a Goss Government, aided by the fiasco of the 'Joh for Canberra' discussed above.

Hampson remained true to his idealism and support for progressive causes not always warmly endorsed by the majority of parliamentarians. The author skilfully captures the chaos and uncertainty of the times as well as the depth of commitment which Hampson brought to the key administrative roles he played within the state ALP. Her use of interviews undertaken very recently can be set against the counterpoint of earlier evidence of actual behaviour and she also blends in historical research such as Sue Yarrow's insightful thesis covering factional issues. Sometimes all this adds up to an indictment of rank hypocrisy among people who regarded Hampson at the time as a major road-block to their own ambitions but were prepared to eulogise him later on.

So the author, Fran Ross, must be complimented for drawing on her own depth of experience and research. She injects a tone of realism into the past factional battles about serious issues which sometimes get air-brushed in the memories and memoirs of more prominent political figures. The book thus serves well the two purposes proclaimed in the front cover – 'biography of a Queensland environmentalist' and 'Terry Hampson, boots and all'.