

# 75 Australian High Flyers

compiled by Barry Jones



Writer and lawyer, Barry Jones is the author of *The Macmillan Dictionary of Biography* and *Barry Jones' Dictionary Of World Biography*. He was the president of the Australian Labor Party, an executive director of the ABC and has been the Federal Member for Labor since 1977. He is credited with reviving the Australian film industry during his time as president of the Australian Film Institute and is recognised as a pioneer of television on the Australian airwaves.

Despite its small population and remoteness, Australia has won international recognition for distinguished contributions in many fields – politics, literature, the arts, sport, business, law and science. Choosing 75 names, one for each year of Qantas' history, was a challenging, sometimes invidious task.

The selection is highly personal. I am notoriously remote from sport and popular music and I have also had to guard against political prejudice. Some major figures who lived in the Qantas years, such as Nellie Melba, Daniel Mannix, Billy Hughes, Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Mary Gilmore and Arthur Streeton were excluded because their major impact was before 1920.

Women have had great difficulty in breaking through the professional 'glass ceiling', except in the arts, literature, nursing and medicine. No women served in a State Parliament until 1921 (Edith Cowan in Western Australia), Federal Parliament until 1943 (Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney), as a Supreme Court judge until 1965 (Roma Mitchell in South Australia), as President of the Australian Academy of Science until 1970 (Dorothy Hill), as a State Premier until 1990 (Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia) or as a High Court judge until 1991 (Mary Gaudron).

Aboriginal achievement in Australia has been unrecognised or undervalued, partly because of an assumption of 'white supremacy', also because numbers were low and access to education almost non-existent.

From European settlement in 1788, Australia was dominated by settlers from the British Isles until Arthur Calwell's mass migration scheme in 1947 set the foundations for 'multicultural' Australia.

Some on the list made their greatest achievements as expatriates; Howard Florey being the outstanding example.

In December 1990, *The Australian Magazine* invited a panel of 14 gurus to nominate the 20 greatest Australians of the 20th century. Dr H.C. "Nugget" Coombs was the most frequent choice, followed by Howard Florey, Robert Menzies, Macfarlane Burnet, Patrick White and Essington Lewis.

Here are my 75 distinguished Australians:



**Dr H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs** (1906- ). Born in Western Australia. Banker, economist and public servant. Played a decisive role in shaping policy and community attitudes in banking, higher education, the arts and Aboriginal affairs.

**Stanley Melbourne Bruce** (1883-1967). Prime Minister 1923-29. Spent only 34 years of his long life in Australia. With his deputy, Earle Page, he created many important Australian institutions, including the CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Established Canberra as the national capital.



**Hudson Fysh** (1895-1974). Became manager of Qantas in 1923, retiring as chairman in 1966. An aviator, like Charles Kingsford Smith and Reg Ansett, until 1930. He was a visionary and internationalist.

**Robert Gordon Menzies** (1894-1978). Our longest-serving Prime Minister: 1939-41, 1949-66. Melbourne QC. He created the Liberal Party in 1944 after its predecessor collapsed, and was an effective orator and tactician who won seven elections.



**Rupert Murdoch** (1931- ). Son of Sir Keith Murdoch who ran *The Herald And Weekly Times*. Turned News Corporation into one of the world's major media owners, but became a US citizen in 1985.

**John Curtin** (1885-1945). Trade unionist and journalist. Prime Minister 1941-45. United the Labor movement. Worked with General MacArthur in meeting the Japanese threat, and died with victory in sight.



**Kerry Packer** (1937- ). Inherited Consolidated Press from Sir Frank Packer and expanded a media empire that includes television, magazines, and a minority shareholding in newspapers.

**Ben Chifley** (1885-1951). Ex-engine driver. Australia's Treasurer 1941-49 and Prime Minister 1945-49. He worked loyally with Curtin. With 'Nugget' Coombs and others he created the model for post-war reconstruction.





**Gough Whitlam** (1916- ). Patrician in style, led Labor (1967-77), ending 23 years in Opposition to become Prime Minister 1972-75. His dismissal by Sir John Kerr (November 1975) remains deeply controversial. His reforms in foreign policy, education, the arts, Australian honors, law reform have mostly survived and he is now a national icon.



**Arthur Augustus Calwell** (1896-1973). Immigration Minister 1945-49. Organised large-scale European migration and passionately opposed the Vietnam War as Labor leader 1960-67.



**Bill Hayden** (1933- ). Ex-Queensland policeman. Largely self-educated, came up the hard way to become Treasurer 1975, Labor leader 1977-83, Foreign Minister 1983-88 and Governor-General 1989-96.



**John Grey Gorton** (1911- ). Oxford-educated, RAAF fighter pilot and citrus grower. Was an unexpected choice as Prime Minister and Liberal leader 1968-71 after Harold Holt disappeared. He opened up new approaches in foreign policy, relationships with the states and the arts (especially film).

**Dr H.V. 'Bert' Evatt** (1894-1965). Brilliant lawyer and High Court judge. Minister for External Affairs 1941-49. Was an architect of the United Nations and of Australia's foreign policy. He was an erratic Labor leader 1951-60.



**Bob Hawke** (1929- ). Enjoyed extraordinary popularity as President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (1970-80). Led Labor to four election wins, and was Prime Minister 1983-91. His *Memoirs* (1994) were controversial.



**Paul John Keating** (1944- ). Left school early. Became a Federal MP at 25, was Treasurer 1983-91, displacing Hawke as Prime Minister in 1991. He is a brilliant Parliamentary performer of the take-no-prisoners school. He transformed the Australian economy and has fought to entrench native title.



**Neville Wran** (1926- ). Successful Sydney QC, Premier of New South Wales 1976-86. Chaired CSIRO 1986-91 and became a merchant banker. He was a masterly strategist.



**Malcolm Fraser** (1930- ). Oxford-educated, then a grazier. Liberal MP 1955-83. Kerr sacked Whitlam in 1975; Fraser was appointed Prime Minister, won three elections, then lost to Hawke. He was a radical on some issues, opposing racism and supporting a republic.





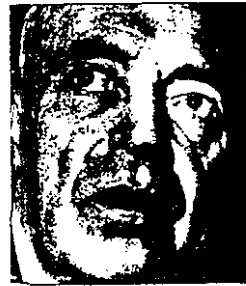
**Garfield Barwick (1903- ).** Was Sydney's leading QC, then Liberal MP 1958-64, Attorney General 1958-64, Foreign Minister 1961-64 and Chief Justice 1964-81. He advised Governor-General John Kerr on Whitlam's dismissal.



**Carmen Mary Lawrence (1948- ).** A clinical psychologist, she became a Labor MLA in Western Australia in 1986 and was Australia's first woman Premier 1990-93. She then transferred to the Commonwealth Parliament as Minister for Human Services and Health.



**Joan Elizabeth Kirner (1938- ).** Was a schoolteacher, ardent community activist, Victorian MP 1982-94, held portfolios in environment and education, succeeding John Cain as Premier 1990-92.



**Owen Dixon (1886-1972).** Mentor of Menzies, he was a High Court Judge from 1929, a Chief Justice 1952-64 and received the Order of Merit in 1963.



**Lionel Murphy (1922-1986).** Labor Senator 1962-75. Was Attorney-General 1972-75 and a controversial High Court Judge 1975-86 whose dissenting approaches were ultimately adopted by the majority.

**Michael Kirby (1939- ).** A judge since 1975, President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal since 1984. Has an almost intimidating intellectual range, including criminology, information theory, AIDS, transborder data flows, human rights, literacy and music.



**Zelman Cowen (1919- ).** Was dean of law at Melbourne University 1951-66, Vice-Chancellor at Queensland University 1970-77 and Governor-General 1977-82. Provided a "touch of healing" after the controversial Sir John Kerr. He is a prolific writer.



**Ninian Stephen (1923- ).** Oxford-born, educated in Scotland, England and Switzerland. Became a Melbourne barrister and High Court judge 1972-82. A surprise appointment as Governor-General 1982-89; like Zelman Cowen and Bill Hayden, he handled it superbly. He became a judge of the International War Crimes Tribunal and was made a Knight of the Garter in 1994.



**Elizabeth Andreas Evatt (1933- ).** A niece of Dr 'Bert' Evatt. Became Chief Judge of the Family Court in 1976. Chaired the Law Reform Commission 1988-93. She is a tireless campaigner for human rights and the status of women.





**Mary Genevieve Gaudron** (1943- ). Won a Gold Medal in Law at Sydney University, was New South Wales Solicitor General 1987-91, and in 1991 became the first woman Justice of the High Court.

**Judith Arundell Wright** (1915- ). Poet. She wrote her family history, edited anthologies, published criticism and campaigned for conserving the environment. Her 12 volumes of poetry "probe universal human questions"



**Essington Lewis** (1881-1961). Industrialist. He became a mining engineer, joined BHP in 1904, became general manager in 1921, retiring in 1950. Directed Australian munitions production and aircraft production during World War II. He was made a Companion of Honor in 1943.

**Thomas Keneally** (1935- ). Novelist. Wrote *The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1972, also filmed). His *Schindler's Ark* (1982) won the Booker Prize and was filmed by Steven Spielberg as *Schindler's List* (1993).



**Kenneth Baillieu Myer** (1921-1992). Born in San Francisco, the son of Sidney Myer who founded the Melbourne retail giant. A farsighted philanthropist who was Whitlam's original choice for Governor-General in 1974. He established the Myer Foundation, chaired the Howard Florey Institute, Victorian Arts Centre and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

**Helen Garner** (1942- ). Novelist. Wrote *Monkey Grip* (1977, also filmed), *Children's Bach* (1984) and *Cosmo Cosmolino* (1992). Her book *The First Stone* (1995) is a controversial analysis of the battle lines in radical feminism.



**Christina Stead** (1902-1983). Novelist. Lived in Europe and the United States 1928-74, winning international recognition with her scaring novel *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940).



**Arvi Hillar Parbo** (1926- ). Engineer, born in Estonia, migrated to Australia in 1949. He became a leader in Australian mining, chaired Western Mining, BHP, Alcoa and also the Chase AMP Bank. Knighted in 1978, he received an AC in 1993

**David Malouf** (1934- ). Novelist and poet. Born in Brisbane; of Lebanese origin. Wrote *An Imaginary Life* (1978), *Harland's Half Acre* (1984), *The Great World* (1990) and *Remembering Babylon* (1993).





**Patrick White (1912-1990).** Born in London, was educated in England, served in the RAF, returning in 1947. *The Tree Of Man* (1953), *Voss* (1957) and *The Eye Of The Storm* (1973) were hailed as masterpieces. He received the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature for his "epic psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature".

**Peter Singer (1946- ).** Philosopher. Was professor at Monash University from 1977, gaining international recognition for his works on bioethics. His *Animal Liberation* (1975) raised novel ethical issues about exploiting and inflicting pain on animals.



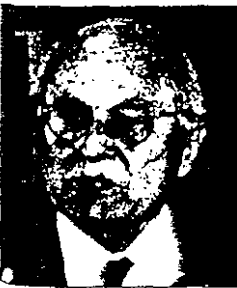
**Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker, nee Roska) (1920-1993).** Poet and Aboriginal rights worker, born on Stradbroke Island. Self-educated, she worked as telephonist and secretary, publishing her first volume of poems *We Are Going* in 1964. She won a Fulbright Scholarship to the US 1978-79 and in 1980 resumed her tribal name

**Germaine Greer (1939- ).** Born in Melbourne, educated at Melbourne, Sydney and Cambridge universities. Her *The Female Eunuch* (1970) ranks as one of the basic texts of the feminist revolution.



**Manning Clark (1915-1991).** Historian. Like Sir Keith Hancock, played a vital role in encouraging Australia's history as a research and teaching discipline. His six-volume *A History Of Australia* (1962-37) generated passionate debate.

**Barry Humphries (1934- ).** Writer and actor, born in Melbourne. He created a series of powerful, savagely satirical stereotypes, reflecting aspects of Australia society. (Alan Bennett is a gentler English equivalent.)



**Donald Horne (1921- ).** Journalist, editor and academic. Wrote *The Lucky Country* (1964) and 20 other books. He argued that "lucky" elements in our history contributed to a lack of intellectual nerve. He chaired the Australia Council 1985-90

**Robert Helpmann (1909-1986).** Dancer, choreographer and actor. He worked in London with Frederick Ashton, partnered Margot Fonteyn, acted in the films *The Red Shoes*, *The Tales Of Hoffman* and *Henry V*. He directed the Australian Ballet 1965-76





**Fred Schepisi** (1939- ). Film director who won international recognition for *The Devil's Playground* (1977). He also directed *Evil Angels* (1988), *The Russia House* (1990) and *Six Degrees Of Separation* (1993).

**Arthur Boyd** (1920- ). Painter and ceramic artist, born in Melbourne. He developed an individual style with his landscape and figurative works, many with literary, biblical or mythological themes. He gave a magnificent estate at Bundanon to the nation.



**Bruce Beresford** (1940- ). Film writer and director. His Australian films include *The Adventures Of Barry McKenzie* (1971), *The Getting Of Wisdom* (1977), and *Breaker Morant* (1979), while international credits include *Black Robe* (1990) and *Driving Miss Daisy* (1990).

**Brett Whiteley** (1939-1992). Painter, lithographer, graphic artist, born in Sydney. He was a virtuoso, whose works could be savage, sensual and lyrical.



**Sidney Nolan** (1917-1992). Painter and mythmaker, born in Melbourne. He painted about 35,000 works (even more than Picasso) and the quality was variable. At his best, he was astonishingly evocative, notably with his *Ned Kelly* and *Gallipoli* paintings. He received the Order of Merit in 1983.

**Fred Williams** (1927-1982). Painter and graphic artist. He evolved a spare, almost calligraphic, style which captured the strangeness and isolation of the Australian landscape.



**Peter Weir** (1944- ). Film director, born in Sydney. He directed *Picnic At Hanging Rock* (1975), *Gallipoli* (1981), *Dead Poets Society* (1986) and *Green Card* (1990).

**Howard Florey** (1898-1968). Born in Adelaide, and a professor at Oxford. He was the principal developer of penicillin, receiving the Nobel Prize and Copley Medal, Presidency of the Royal Society, Order of Merit and a peerage.





**Ian Clunies Ross (1899-1959).** A dynamic veterinary scientist, Chairman of CSIRO 1949-59, was an effective publicist and lobbyist who died prematurely. (Florey and Clunies Ross appear on our \$A50 note)

**Fred Hollows (1930-1993).** New Zealand-born rough diamond and ophthalmologist; worked with Australian Aborigines and in Somalia and Nepal. Attained public hero status before his death from cancer.



**Macfarlane Burnet (1899-1985).** Born in Traralgon. An outstanding theoretician in immunology. Developed "clonal selection" and "acquired immunological tolerance". He directed the Hall Institute for Medical Research in Melbourne 1944-65, receiving the Order of Merit (1958), Copley Medal (1959) and the Nobel Prize for Medicine (1960).

**Jean MacNamara (1899-1968).** An outstanding pioneer of research into poliomyelitis and also in the use of myxomatosis to combat the rabbit plague.



**Gus Nossal (1931- ).** Immunologist, born in Austria. He succeeded Burnet at the Hall Institute, led Australia's most gifted team, including Jacques Miller and Don Metcalfe. A charismatic public spokesman on science and President of the Australian Academy of Science from 1994.

**Adrienne Clarke (1938- ).** Professor of Biology at Melbourne. Became Chair of CSIRO in 1991 and was an effective advocate for science, and promoting career opportunities for women.



**Frank Fenner (1914- ).** Worked with Burnet and won the Copley Medal (1995) for his international leadership of the campaign to eradicate smallpox.

**Mark Oliphant (1901- ).** Studied with Ernest Rutherford; worked on the development of the atomic bomb (which he later campaigned against). Was first President of the Australian Academy of Science 1954-57 and Governor of South Australia, his home state, 1971-76.







**John Eccles** (1903- ). Physiologist; born in Melbourne, educated at Melbourne High and Melbourne University. He worked in New Zealand and the US, then retired to Switzerland. He won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1963 for his work on the chemical transmission of signals in the nervous system.



**Peter Sculthorpe** (1929- ). Composer. Encouraged by the conductor Bernard Heinze (1894-1982) and the ABC, he was, apart from the expatriate Percy Grainger, the most performed Australian composer. His works include 11 string quartets, an opera, film scores and *Sun Music I-IV*.



**Jim Peacock** (1937- ). Plant geneticist with CSIRO. Was a protégé of Sir Otto Frankel (1900- ), and a leader in biotechnological research. "Gene shears" was developed in his Division of Plant Industry.



**Charles Mackerras** (1925- ). Conductor. An oboist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra who, encouraged by Eugene Goossens, gained an international reputation as a conductor in Britain, the US, Germany and Czechoslovakia. He revived the operas of Leos Janacek, winning many awards for his recordings.



**Joan Sutherland** (1926- ). Soprano, born in Sydney. She began her international career in London in 1952, married the conductor Richard Bonyngé in 1954 and was regarded as a phenomenon from 1959. Awarded the Order of Merit in 1991, she acted in the film revival of *On Our Selection* (1995).



**Don Bradman** (1908- ). Cricketer, born in Bowral. Regarded as Australia's most brilliant and consistent batsman, his record score of 452 runs not out (1930) stood for more than 60 years until Brian Lara scored 501 (1994). He was Australia's Test captain between 1936-49, receiving a knighthood in 1949 and an AC in 1979.



**Jennie George** (1947- ). Trade unionist, born in Italy to Russian Jewish refugees. She became a teacher and President of the New South Wales Teachers Federation 1986-89. The first woman on the ACTU Executive (1983), she became Vice President (1987), Assistant Secretary (1991) and President-elect (1995).



**Hubert Opperman** (1904- ). Cyclist and politician, born in Victoria. "Oppy" was Australian cycling's road champion from 1924 and won international competitions in 1928 and 1931. He was a Liberal MP 1949-67, a Minister, High Commissioner to Malta and a knight.



**Dawn Fraser (1937- ).** Swimmer. She won Gold Medals at the Olympics in 1956, 1960 and 1964, became a coach, a publican in Balmain and an independent MP in the New South Wales Parliament 1988-91. A passionate non-conformist, she broke 40 world records.

**Douglas Mawson (1882-1958).** Geologist and Antarctic explorer, born in Yorkshire. Professor of geology at Adelaide 1921-52. He led two major expeditions to Antarctica 1911-14; 1929-31, enduring extraordinary hardship. He appears on the \$A100 note.



**John Monash (1865-1931).** Soldier and administrator; led Australian troops at Gallipoli and in the Western Front. After 1920 he resumed practice as an engineer, chaired the Victorian State Electricity Commission 1921-31, and was Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University 1923-31. Monash University was named in his honor (1959).

**Phillip Garth Law (1912- ).** Explorer, administrator and physicist. Directed the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions 1949-66. He established the Mawson, Davis and Casey stations, explored 4500 kilometres of coast and wrote *Antarctic Odyssey* (1983).



**Thomas Albert Blamey (1884-1951).** Australia's only field marshal. A schoolteacher from Wagga, he worked with Monash in World War I and had a dodgy reputation as Victoria's police chief 1925-36. His fellow generals disliked him but he had a powerful mind, and, as Commander-in-Chief of Allied Military Forces in the South West Pacific 1942-45, worked closely with Curtin and MacArthur.

**Harry Seidler (1923- ).** Architect. Born in Vienna, trained in Canada and Brazil, worked in Sydney from 1949. He brought the Bauhaus tradition to Australia. His buildings include the Australian Embassy, Paris.



**Edward 'Weary' Dunlop (1907-1993).** Surgeon. He acquired heroic status for his leadership of Australian prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Java and the Thailand-Burma railway. His *War Diaries* (1986) were memorable. He was knighted (1969) and received an AC (1987).

**John Andrews (1933- ).** Studied at Harvard, worked in Toronto, returning to Sydney in 1972. His CN Tower in Toronto is Canada's tallest structure. He designed many institutional and university buildings in the US, Canada and Australia and was an advocate for better design standards.

