

KENNETH R. DUTTON

Ian Henning

(1905–1975)

a man & his times

Ian Henning was Professor of French at the University of Sydney from 1946 to 1970. He formed an entire generation of French scholars, many of whom went on to occupy high positions in Australia and overseas, including several university Chairs of French.

In this biography, Kenneth R. Dutton sets out to explode the myth which portrayed Henning as a stern and arch-conservative scholar in the mould of his formidable predecessor G. G. Nicholson. Drawing extensively on archival material including Henning's correspondence with family members, the author depicts a many-faceted character of warmth, wit and charm, whose deep-seated shyness allied to a talent for acting led him to adopt a series of "personae".

Behind the apparently reserved and aloof professor, the biography reveals a man full of genuine concern for his students and deeply committed to the care of an at times troubled family, whose welfare always took precedence over his own comfort. It reveals, too, a man who in early life had to struggle to find an academic position and who knew about the pangs of unemployment. It traces the formation of Ian Henning's intellectual views and of his academic emphases, as well as the influence on him of his fellow-students in Europe, all of whom were to make brilliant careers.

Above all, the book brings out the delightful sense of humour which lay at the heart of Ian Henning's deep humanity.

This is not merely the biography of an individual, but also an evocation of the times through which he lived. From the days of such legendary academic figures as G. G. Nicholson, Christopher Brennan and Gladys Marks to those of mini-skirted undergraduates, from the heyday of Fabian Socialism and the League of Nations to the dying days of the Whitlam Government, the background to Ian Henning's life involves some of the major academic and social movements of the 20th century.

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