

## Tribute to Colin Nettelbeck

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There would be no ISFAR and no *Explorations* (now *The French Australian Review*) without Colin Nettelbeck who, together with Wallace Kirsop and the late Dennis Davison, launched the institute and the journal. This occurred in 1985, inspired by Victoria's sesqui-centenary celebrations and the ground-breaking 1984 exhibition entitled 'The French Presence in Victoria 1800–1901', initiated by Dianne Reilly. The three founders were based at Monash University, Dennis, who had a French wife, in the English Department and Wallace and Colin in the French Department.

The event that led to the creation of ISFAR and *Explorations* was a two-day meeting on the theme of the 'France-Victoria Connection' held on May 31 and June 1, 1985, at Monash. The meeting was a response to similar initiatives by a team of French scholars at the University of NSW. What sets the Monash operation apart is the long life of ISFAR and its journal: having extended their coverage to the whole of Australia, they are now celebrating their 35th anniversary.

Wallace Kirsop took responsibility for *Explorations*, the first edition of which appeared on the eve of the 'France-Victoria Connection' meeting. It began as a modest bulletin but gradually gained in breadth and depth of coverage. Colin took charge of ISFAR, the Institute for the Study of French-Australian Relations. This somewhat high-flown title was not Colin's choice: he would have preferred 'Centre', to suggest the 'gathering of the many threads of interest in relations between France and Australia', to quote Colin, but in order to secure an institutional base, the founders accepted the requirements of the Monash Administration. 'Centre' was not acceptable, 'Institute' was, and Colin was appointed its 'Director'.

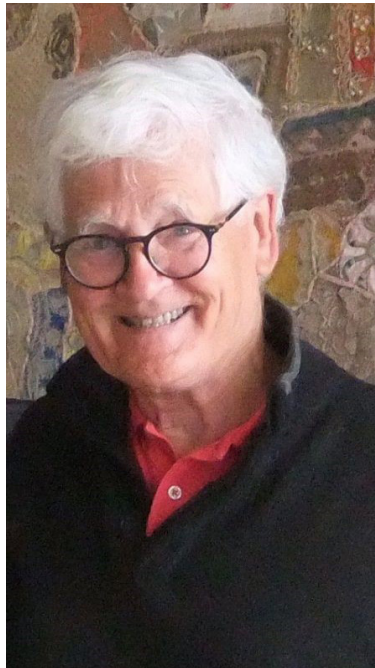
Dennis Davison continued to contribute to *Explorations* and to assist Wallace Kirsop with the production of the journal for the best part of a decade. This cooperation was interrupted in June 1994 with Dennis's premature death.

When in the same year Colin took up his new appointment as A. R. Chisholm Professor of French at the University of Melbourne, ISFAR's move from Monash to Melbourne followed. ISFAR already had an outpost at Melbourne, thanks to Pat Clancy and the late Colin Thornton-Smith. *Explorations* remained at Monash for a little longer, given Wallace's continued connection with Monash, but it also eventually moved to Melbourne.

Colin held the presidency for two seven-year periods between 1985–1992 and 2011–2018 until his retirement from ISFAR at the beginning of 2018. His last major achievements were setting up the Research Committee and the creation of the on-line *French-Australian Dictionary of Biography*. When you see what ISFAR and the *French Australian Review* stand for, you realise that, together with Wallace Kirsop, Colin has created a new branch of scholarship.

Colin was born at Streaky Bay on the Eyre Peninsula on March 29, 1938. He spent his first three years in country South Australia, before moving to Adelaide. Like many South Australians, his parentage comprised a Barossa Valley German component, as indicated by his surname. The other components were Irish, on his father's side, Scottish and Dutch Jewish on his mother's side. He lost his father early in World War 2, in 1941, in the Middle East. He and his siblings were brought up by his mother and his stepfather, a teacher by profession. Colin completed his secondary studies at Prince Alfred College, a leading private school in Adelaide, and then undertook an Arts degree at the University of Adelaide. During his undergraduate years he converted to Catholicism and became a fervent believer. He graduated with First Class Honours and began his working life as a secondary teacher of Latin, French and Mathematics, a logical but nonetheless unusual combination. Having gained a French government scholarship, he went to Paris and enrolled for a doctorate at the Sorbonne. He was awarded the title of Doctor of the University of Paris in 1964, for a thesis on Catholic novelist and public intellectual Georges Bernanos. Bernanos was also the subject of his first published book.

It was during his student days in Paris that Colin met his future wife Carol, an American of Italian background. Carol was a graduate of the highly regarded Middlebury College, Vermont, and was studying at the Sorbonne for a Master's degree. They married in Paris in 1963: the wedding was performed by the University Chaplain, Father Jean-Marie Lustiger, who later became Archbishop of Paris and subsequently Cardinal, possibly the only Cardinal of Jewish origin in the modern Roman Catholic Church. The Nettelbecks remained friends with Cardinal Lustiger for the rest of his life, and Colin published two articles on him.



Colin's first university appointment was as an Instructor and subsequently Assistant Professor at the prestigious Berkeley campus of the University of California where he spent eight years. Colin's and Carol's three children, Alexander, Jennifer and Bridget, were born in California. Colin returned to Australia with his family in 1971 and we were most fortunate at Monash to welcome him as our colleague. It was without question the best appointment made in the French Department, certainly during my years at Monash.

Colin spent twenty-three years at Monash, first as a Senior Lecturer and then as an Associate Professor. The crowning of his formal university career was his appointment as A. R. Chisholm Professor of French at the University of Melbourne, the first holder of the newly named chair of French. He held the A. R. Chisholm Chair for eleven years, including a term as Head of the School of Languages. In 2005 he retired from the Chair and was appointed Emeritus Professor of the University of Melbourne.

Most scholars in the humanities have two, three or at most half a dozen areas of academic expertise. Colin's nine books and the thirty chapters he authored, reflecting his very broad intellectual and professional interests, cover an exceptionally wide range of topics. His articles, numbering over a hundred, have appeared in a variety of Australian and international journals. In his years as a senior scholar, his work was supported by several competitive Australian Research Council grants. He also carried out numerous book reviews for the Australian Book Review over the years.

A great deal of his research is devoted to specific French authors, with in-depth attention given to Bernanos, Céline and Modiano, but covering many others, whilst some of his other publications deal with post-war and contemporary French cinema and the work of influential filmmakers, such as Godard, Truffaut, Claude Chabrol and Louis Malle, to quote only a few.

But Colin is not only a literary scholar and a cinema specialist: he has broad historical interests, covering political and social history, and more importantly cultural history. He has written on various aspects of the two world wars, and more specifically on France under the German occupation and also on French exiles in the United States during World War 2. More closely to us, of course, Colin has devoted his energies and his talents to the exploration of the history of French-Australian relations and he has published widely in that area.

I would like to close this tribute to Colin by evoking his many activities and contributions outside the strictly scholarly field. He has carried important administrative and managerial responsibilities within the University and has contributed to policy-making in the area of language teaching both at university level and in the broader community. He also acted as a guide and a leader in various organisations, including the Australian Academy of the Humanities, of which he is a Fellow, and the Alliance Française. He was

president of the Melbourne branch of the Alliance for a number of years, and also of the Federation of the Alliances Françaises of Australia for a term. He is the author of *The Alliance Française in Australia, 1890–1990: an Historical Perspective*, now a standard reference work.

Colin's outstanding contribution to so many fields was recognised by the award of several distinctions, such as the French Palmes Académiques and the Légion d'honneur, as well as the Australian Centenary Medal. He is also a life member of ISFAR, of course, as well as ASFS (the Australian Society for French Studies), and LCNAU (the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities) for which he was part of the original project team in 2011–2012.

Finally let us recall that Colin is also a talented jazz pianist and jazz composer: in 2017 he was one of the stars of 'Three of a Kind', a Nettelbeck jazz concert held at fortyfivedownstairs in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. The other two stars were his son Alexander, a professional musician, and Colin's older brother Ted Nettelbeck, all three jazz pianists. Ted is also Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. Furthermore, linking his love of jazz and his scholarly interests, Colin is the author of a most original book entitled *Dancing with De Beauvoir: Jazz and the French*, published by Melbourne University Press in 2004.

Colin Nettelbeck is far from being the average academic: in addition to his scholarly aptitude and achievements, he possesses artistic talents and superior social gifts, warmth, empathy and a sense of humour. He is a true Renaissance man, excelling in a very wide range of human endeavour.

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