



Vale Dame Elisabeth Murdoch (1909-2012)



Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE died at her home at Cruden Farm on 6 December 2012 aged 103. She was the inaugural patron of the Henry Handel Richardson Society on its formation in 2008. When Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele began their huge HHR research project at Monash University they applied to the Murdoch Foundation for additional funding and her interest in the project became very personal. As each book that they edited was published and a copy sent to her, she always responded with a handwritten letter and it was clear from her comments that she had read each one. Her favourite among HHR's books was *Maurice Guest* and she bought several copies to give to her friends as they celebrated their birthdays. She will be greatly missed.

Samuel David Runci (1973-2013)

It is also with great sadness that we report the death of Sam Runci, Janey Runci's son, on 24 January. Janey has temporarily stepped down as secretary for the society and Meg Probyn is Acting Secretary in the interim. Our sincere condolences go to Janey and her family.

Our new patron Bruce Beresford

The HHRSA is delighted to announce that the distinguished Australian film director Bruce Beresford has agreed to become our new patron. Readers of HHR's work will recall his 1978 film of *The Getting of Wisdom*, the first production of the newly formed Victorian Film Corporation, in collaboration with the Australian Film Commission and the Nine Network. Several thousand girls were interviewed for the school pupil roles, and it was shot at the Methodist Ladies' College, Melbourne, starring Susannah Fowle as Laura, alongside Barry Humphries, John Waters and Terence Donovan, and with early career appearances by Kerry Armstrong, Sigrid Thornton, Noni Hazlehurst, Maggie Kirkpatrick and Julia Blake.

The Getting of Wisdom was nominated for five AFI awards in 1978 and won in the Best Adapted Screenplay (Eleanor Witcombe) category. More recently, he directed *Driving*

Miss Daisy (1989: which opened as a stage play in Sydney) and *Mao's Last Dancer* (2009). An autobiographical account of his film career in Hollywood, *Josh Hartnett Definitely Wants To Do This... True Stories From A Life In The Screen Trade* (2009) describes his career-long interest in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, for which he has prepared a filmscript. His career takes him out of Australia for much of the time, but we hope to see him at the Annual Oration in October this year.



Bruce Beresford, Bruce Steele and Clive Probyn at the launch of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, at the State Library of Victoria, October 2007. HHR's typewriter was presented to the State Library at the same event.

Annual General Meeting 3 January 2013: President's Report to the meeting

The most important event this last year was of course the inaugural HHR Writing Competition. We received about 70 entries, most but not all from Australia, and the shortlist was judged by the novelist Helen Garner. She also presented the prizes, certificates, and cheques to winners and the runners up.

Our secretary, Janey Runci, will speak in some detail about the Competition, but I should like to warmly welcome the winners of the two categories, the Open and the Schools category, who are here today—Bronwyn Minifie, from Maldon, and Ashleigh Mounser, from Kincumber, NSW.

The Competition prize giving was held in the Red Rotunda at the State Library of Victoria. The occasion also included the 2012 Annual Oration, given this year by one of Australia's most distinguished biographers, Dr Brenda Niall, who spoke about the relationship between Richardson and her first biographer, Nettie Palmer. A detailed review of this talk may be found on the Society's user-friendly web page. The talk itself will also appear there, as well as in a forthcoming issue of the *ABR: Australian Book Review*. The whole event was strongly supported by Society members and non-members alike, and we managed to fill the

magnificent Red Rotunda in the State Library of Victoria. We are happy to acknowledge the support for the Competition enthusiastically given by Text Publishing, and we also gratefully acknowledge the financial gifts made by anonymous donors.

Your President was interviewed about HHR and the Writing Competition for about 20 minutes by Michael Cathcart on the ABC National Book Program on 13 August. Our Secretary, Janey Runci, sent out four Newsletters during the course of the year.

There was some less happy news. Our Patron, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, passed away on 5 December, aged 103. On the Society's behalf, the President sent a letter of condolence to the family at Cruden Farm: it acknowledged Dame Elisabeth's interest in and support for this Society, as its first Patron, appointed in January 2008 and also her very considerable financial support for the 15-year research program known as the Monash Henry Handel Richardson Project, which produced modern, complete, and accurate editions of all Richardson's novels, letters, music, and prompted publications of her parents' letters too, as well as a biography of HHR, four PhDs and two MA theses. As we shall see later at the book launch, the research work continues to appear.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the full committee for all its work during 2012. It has been a very successful year, and I hope they will understand if I make particular acknowledgement of the work of our Secretary, Janey Runci, and the Treasurer, Graeme Charles. And a very special mention and thanks to Rex Fuge, who resigned from the committee today (see below)

Clive Probyn, President HHRSA



Life Membership for Rex Fuge OAM

Rex Fuge, who stepped down as Vice-President at the AGM in January 2013, was awarded Life Membership of the Henry Handel Richardson Society 'in appreciation of his dedicated service to the Society'. He was the founding President of the Society in January 2008 and Vice-President since January 2012. The Society is very grateful for all his support over the years and for the support given by Mary, his wife.



Mary Fuge with Rosemary Gordon, President of the National Trust North East Ladies Auxiliary, cutting the birthday cake

News from Leipzig, Germany

One of our two enthusiastic German members, Professor Stefan Welz, Department of English at Leipzig University reports that his translation project of HHR's *Maurice Guest* is advancing slowly but surely. Another reading from translated chapters together with a musical performance of selected pieces from Richardson's compositions is planned for October this year.

Stefan also reports that the Society's very first German member, Susan Schaale, is writing diligently on her Bachelor Thesis on HHR, focusing on HHR in Leipzig. Another of his students is doing research on HHR's time in Munich and Strasbourg for her Masters Thesis.

It is wonderful to know that we have helped stimulate this interest in HHR, in this grand German city, that of course is famous via its association with J S Bach. If you are going to be anywhere near Leipzig in October this year, please let Graeme Charles know and he will put you in touch with Stefan Welz.

Graeme Charles, Vice-President

Book launch

Bruce Steele's latest book, *Walter Lindsay Richardson MD: A Victorian Seeker*, was launched at the AGM by Clive Probyn. We now have the first biography of HHR's father as much more than the model for Richard Mahony. Indeed we now have the 'real' to measure against the 'fictional' and Bruce describes for the first time Walter's professional life as a GP and obstetrician in Ballarat and Chiltern. There is more here: as the sub-title hints, Walter had an alert and enquiring mind, and a particular interest in Spiritualism, a method of enquiry now marginalised but which in Walter's time drew in some of the leading thinkers of the day, particularly those attempting to reconcile Science and religion in both Melbourne and London.

Walter's daughter never lost her interest in Spiritualism and in many ways her husband was right to suggest that the image of Richard Mahony in her great trilogy was also an image of herself.

The book is well illustrated, includes a number of Walter's papers on spiritualism—now easy to read for the first time—and also a list of Walter's extensive publications in Ballarat's newspapers, medical journals and in the *Harbinger of Light*, as well as two booklets, one of which is titled *Why I do not Practise Homoeopathy*.

Copies of this essential study are available from Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 7 Little Lothian Street North, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051 (aspic@ozemail.com.au).



Bruce Steele signing copies of his book after the launch

Competition plans

The success of our HHR Writing Competition in 2012 has encouraged us to consider another one! This we hope will be run in 2014, subject to us raising the necessary funds. In 2012 we received a number of generous private donations and sponsorships. We shall need such help again!



Bronwyn Minifie (from Maldon, the winner of the Open Section of the HHR Writing Competition, reading her story at the AGM)



The winner of the Schools Section, Ashleigh Mouser from Kincumber Public High School, NSW, reading her story

Oration October 18

We are intending to hold the Annual Oration (to be given this year by Bruce Beresford) on 18 October 2013 at the State Library of Victoria. Further details will follow.

Subscriptions are now \$15 per year

At the AGM on 3 January 2013 it was agreed to raise the annual subscription to \$15 per year.

Please don't forget that subscriptions were due to be paid from 4 January 2013. If you haven't already done so, please post your cheque to: The Treasurer, Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia, 69 Conness Street, Chiltern, Victoria 3683.

HHRSA Committee

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| <u>Secretary:</u> | Janey Runci |
| <u>Treasurer:</u> | Dot Charles |
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