

Anglo-Australian Attitudes: Remembering and Re-reading Russel Ward¹

Carl Bridge
King's College London

I knew Russel Ward best in his glorious anecdotage. In my job as head of the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies in London I am called upon regularly to try to explain the actions and words of my fellow Australians to the puzzled Poms and quite often I rely on stories I heard first from Russel Ward to see me through. Recently, for instance, there was a racial vilification case in Queensland where an English migrant failed to have his employer convicted for calling him a 'Pommie bastard'. I was asked on BBC 5 Live radio to please explain. As there was an Ashes cricket series on at the time – my interview was actually interrupted to report another Shane Warne wicket at Lord's – it was entirely appropriate that I should recall Russel's yarn about an incident in the infamous 'Bodyline' tests of 1932-33. The story goes that the much-despised English captain, Douglas Jardine, went into the Australian dressing room to complain that one of the Australian players had called his prize fast bowler, Harold Larwood, a bastard, whereupon the Australian skipper, who was a very proper Victorian headmaster called Bill Woodfull, turned to his team mates and asked: 'Which one of you bastards called that bastard a bastard?'² Thus, of course, Woodfull cleverly used the term respectively with its positive, negative and neutral connotations. Such is the richness of the Australian vernacular.

In his first reaction to the awful tragedy in New York and Washington³ Prime Minister John Howard said it was 'an act of bastardry'; he was surely the only world leader to call it that. For me, it was always a pleasure to listen to Russel's vivid

¹ This is the text of the Russel Ward Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of New England on 12 September 2001. The lecture itself had a somewhat different title: 'Anglo-Australian Attitudes. Russel Ward: Gentleman, Scholar, Atheist, Communist'. Otherwise, the text is essentially as delivered.

² R. Ward, *A Nation for a Continent: The History of Australia, 1901-1975*, Richmond (Vic), 1977, p. 191.

³ The Al-Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and on the Pentagon in Washington occurred the day before this lecture was presented.

Australianisms: 'Blind Freddy' was never far away, 'Hughie' was often 'sending it down' or 'Buckley' having his almost futile 'chance'. And, inevitably, nearly all those in authority over us were 'swivel-eyed bastards' or 'barnacles on the backside of the state'. But Russel Ward was not only a colourful character and raconteur; he was a superb historian.

Russel Ward will be remembered forever for his great work, *The Australian Legend*, first published in 1958, which delineated once and for all the essential elements of what he called variously the Australian mystique, ethos, legend or character. To quote the classic passage:

National character is not, as was once held, something inherited; nor is it, on the other hand, entirely a figment of the imagination of poets, publicists and other feckless dreamers. It is rather a people's idea of itself and this stereotype, though often absurdly romanticised or exaggerated, is always connected with reality in two ways. It springs largely from a people's past experiences, and it often modifies current events by colouring men's ideas of how they ought 'typically' to behave.

According to the myth the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing 'to have a go' at anything, but willing, too, to be content with a task done in a way that is 'near enough'. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is 'the world's best confidence man', he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a 'hard case', sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a

good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and above all will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong. No epithet in his vocabulary is more completely damning than 'scab' unless it be 'pimp' in its peculiar Australian meaning of 'informer'. He tends to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss.⁴

Russel Ward's great book then proceeds to develop a clear and compelling argument to back his case. He saw these values as nurtured by the convict experience, enhanced by the strong admixture of 'currency lads' and 'lasses', and by the concentration of 'old lags' and Australian-born on the frontier and especially among pastoral workers. This was a frontier where all could be fixed with a little practical ingenuity, where, to quote one of Ward's favourite bush songs, 'stringy-bark ... and green-hide' would 'never fail yer', 'stringy-bark and green-hide' were 'the mainstay of Australia!'⁵ The Australian or bush ethos was temporarily blunted by the mass middle-class migration of the gold rushes, but it was reasserted by the shearers' unions and the Anzacs. Lawson, Paterson and Furphy were its scribes and bards, the bushrangers 'Australians *par excellence*'.⁶ We Australians all aspire to be 'as game as Ned Kelly'.⁷

The *Legend* was for decades Australia's best-selling history book and has always been in print. Clearly it spoke to something deep inside us. This is not to say that it has not inspired spirited criticism – loads of it. To name a few critics: Humphrey McQueen in *A New Britannia* (1970) pointed out that the Australian worker was

⁴ R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1966 [1958], pp. 1-2.

⁵ 'Stringy-bark and Green-hide', George Chanson, *The Sydney Songster* (1866), cited in *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷ R. Ward, *Australia*, Melbourne, 1965, p. 75.

Anglophile, racist, and hankered for suburban respectability — a piano behind the lace curtains in every bay window.⁸ Russel Ward's colleague, Miriam Dixon, in *The Real Matilda* (1976), spoke up for the female half of the Australian population whose characteristics were, to say the least, muted in Ward's very masculinist text.⁹ John Hirst, the South Australian, wrote of the rival 'pioneer legend', which glorified not the 'work and bust' pastoral worker, but the respectable smallholders and tradesmen who were the backbone of Australian, perhaps just South Australian, society.¹⁰ Graeme Davison suggested that Lawson, Paterson and company dreamed up the legend in the boarding houses of downtown Sydney, and were, for the most part, urban bushmen,¹¹ while John Carroll added that all European Australians were 'intruders in the bush'.¹² More recently, Richard Nile has edited a collection, *The Australian Legend and its Discontents* (2000) in which there are treatments of other sites of Australian-ness, including the beach (lifesavers), the city (larrikins, bohemians and queers) and the sporting field (ockers and others).¹³

But, despite all of this amendment, elaboration and attempted refutation, Russel Ward's book remains the supreme evocation and interpretation of its subject. Like a great whale savaged by sharks, the *Legend* swims on, accumulating scars, bits falling off here and there, occasionally changing its course a little, but seemingly immortal.¹⁴ Here, I wish to explore, in particular, two aspects of the *Legend*. First, its connection with Russel Ward's own personal background and life. And, secondly, its intimate, though often only

⁸ H. McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Melbourne, 1970.

⁹ M. Dixon, *The Real Matilda*, Melbourne, 1976.

¹⁰ J. B. Hirst, 'The Pioneer Legend', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 71, October 1978, pp. 316-37.

¹¹ G. Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: an urban context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 71, October 1978, pp. 191-209.

¹² J. Carroll (ed.), *Intruders in the Bush: the Australian quest for identity*, Melbourne, 1982.

¹³ R. Nile (ed.), *The Australian Legend and its Discontents*, Brisbane, 2000.

¹⁴ Note Ward's two characteristically pugnacious and unapologetic defences of his position: 'The Australian Legend Revisited', *Historical Studies*, No. 71, 1978, pp. 171-90, and *The Back Side of the Australian Legend*, Armidale (NSW), 1986.

assumed rather than stated, and now very unfashionable, connection with Britishness in its Anglo-Australian form.

Who, then, was Russel Ward? He was born in Adelaide on the day the HMAS *Sydney* beached the German raider *Emden* in the Cocos Islands in the Royal Australian Navy's first significant action, 9 November 1914.¹⁵ His forebears were respectable Anglo-Australian middle-class and minor gentry. His mother was a Braddock, her father a bank manager, her grandfather a medical doctor who arrived in Adelaide in 1842. Braddock was Russel's middle name and he used to tell the story that when he met American historians they would ask whether he was descended from the British General Braddock who was slaughtered by Indians with his column near Fort Duquesne in the Seven Years War in the incident made famous by James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. Russel inevitably said 'No', but in fact he was descended from the general's brother, whose own ancestor, Edward Braddock, had been a general under Charles II in the Coldstream Guards. Russel's mother's mother was a Day, and the Days were a well known old Adelaide family (one of the 'oafs' as the locals call them), even more respectable than the Braddocks.

Russel's father, J. F. Ward, was headmaster of Adelaide's second most prestigious greater public school, Prince Alfred College. J. F. was born in Manchester and descended from smallholders in Yorkshire. Both parents were staunch Methodists and teetotallers. Russel attended schools in Charters Towers (Queensland), Perth (Western Australia) and then Adelaide (South Australia). He never attended a school of which his father was not headmaster. As he later remarked, he grew up a strong Methodist, a believer in the British Empire, and a 'thorough-going little snob'. 'No-one, even in South Australia, could have been a more perfidiously loyal Briton than I was at 17.'¹⁶

¹⁵ Unless otherwise indicated the biographical information here is either from personal recollection or from R. Ward, *A Radical Life: The Autobiography of Russel Ward*, Melbourne, 1988.

¹⁶ Ward, *Radical Life*, p. 54.

At Adelaide University Russel read English literature, and a bit of history, and narrowly missed out on the Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford for 1936. He edited the University magazine, and rowed in the eight which won the Australian inter-varsity race. Visitors to Russel's house in Beardy Street, Armidale, will remember the huge oar that had pride of place on the wall: it was the one Russel had used for the deed. In defiance of his parents, he smoked, drank and generally enjoyed himself.

His father's connections then helped secure him a teaching post at Geelong Grammar, and in 1939 he switched to Sydney Grammar, where he coached the 1940 Head of the River and as 'Bull' Ward – because of his loud and imperious voice – became famous at 25 as the youngest ever successful coach of that event. He had married Margaret Ind, of another 'oaf', in 1939. Russel never lost his pukka accent, his gentlemanly courtliness (though this could be selective) and his 'word of command'. He sported a clipped, military-style moustache and often wore a cravat. Don Aitkin, a student of his at the University of New England (UNE) who rose to be Vice-Chancellor of another Australian university, wrote in an obituary that Russel had 'the general air of a retired colonel'.¹⁷

As with many of his generation, the Spanish Civil War and later Fascist aggression converted Russel to communism and in Sydney in 1941 he joined the party and later was president of his local branch in the very respectable middle-class suburb of Mosman. He was an active member of the party – mostly leafleting and propagandising – for the next fifteen years. Also in the late 1930s he spent several holidays travelling in the bush and working casually as a wheat lumper, miner's mate, road labourer and rouseabout.

After a wartime stint in the Australian Army as a sergeant in the Psychological Unit, he moved to state school teaching, partly out of egalitarian conviction, but also to give him more time to write. He began his literary career humbly, by composing captions for a Weet Bix card series on 'Wonders of the Pacific', but graduated to reviewing regularly for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and wrote two

¹⁷ D. Aitkin, in *Monitor: the newspaper of the University of Canberra*, 23 August 1995.

best-selling and mildly Marxist junior high-school textbooks, *Man makes History* and *Britons make an Empire*. In 1953 he won a scholarship to the Australian National University where he wrote his doctoral thesis, 'The ethos and influence of the Australian Pastoral Worker', which eventually became the book, *The Australian Legend*, and made him famous.

Russel applied without success for two posts at Wagga Wagga Teachers' College (now Charles Sturt University) and at the University of Technology (now the University of New South Wales) and discovered to his fury that his communist associations had led to his being blackballed by the State Public Service Board.¹⁸ His fortunes changed, however, in 1957 when UNE, then a staunch bastion of Country Party conservatism, had the wisdom to appoint him to a lectureship in History. He rose quickly to the chair and retired in 1980 to become Deputy-Chancellor. There were fourteen other books, among them his celebrated twentieth-century history, *A Nation for a Continent* (1977) and his autobiography *A Radical Life* (1988). He died on 13 August 1995 and his secular memorial gathering attended by some 300 of us, was held in the Arts Theatre at UNE, five days later.¹⁹

It fell to me to chair that gathering. According to strict instructions left by the great man himself, many spoke. We all avoided, as stipulated in the instructions, any mention of the Almighty, ostensibly so as not to offend Russel's memory, as Russel had been a humanist since the early 1940s. Towards the end of the proceedings we were enjoined to listen to a tape which Russel, with intimations of mortality, had recorded in 1984 especially for the occasion. On listening to this, we were all gobsmacked as the old master intended us to be. (There was something of *The Wizard of Oz* about the stagecraft.) We heard Russel's disembodied voice, coming it seemed almost from beyond the grave. The voice launched into a heartfelt and scholarly disquisition on his relationship with God and

¹⁸ See F. Crowley, 'The Ward Fabrication', *Quadrant*, Vol. 47, No. 5, May 2004, for a different version.

¹⁹ The full proceedings are published in C. Bridge (ed.), *Russel Ward: A Celebration*, Armidale (NSW), 1996.

Christianity, how he could not glorify a God he believed 'just is not there'.²⁰ How heaven and hell were unworthy creations, 'profoundly un-Christian', how he was a humanist and agnostic (I should think, actually, given his first statement, an atheist) and how we should all follow the great rationalist Ralph Ingersoll and 'do good, for good is good to do'.²¹ With that, a rendition by Barry McDonald of 'Waltzing Matilda', and a drink, the gathering ended. A small group of us then went to the Armidale Cemetery where high on the open hillside overlooking the town and to the haunting strains of 'The Wild Colonial Boy', this particular wild colonial boy was interred. The grave is now marked with a rock of New England granite.

Russel's life then, in important ways, prefigured the legend (or, to be more accurate perhaps, in the mind's eye of his memoirs was made so to do). He rejected the straitjacket of British or English middle-class respectability; he championed, at least in print, the underdog; he believed in and practised mateship; and he was sceptical of organised religion though not of the humanist values to be found in the life of Christ. He enjoyed a drink, a smoke and a yarn, and he sought the company of women.

A few examples from the autobiography, the *Legend*, and other of Russel's works should suffice to illustrate these points. The *Legend* cites Alexander Harris in 1849 caricaturing a colonial commissary: 'he looks as if he's done nothing all his life but sit and munch roast beef between the muzzles of two cannon';²² and Henry Kingsley's *Geoffry Hamlyn*: 'These prisoners hate the sight of a parson above all mortal men.'²³ In his autobiography Russel describes two clergymen who visited his school:

One was thin and scraggy while the other carried several rolls of fat under his chin and his belly; otherwise they might have been identical twins. Both disguised their spiritual nakedness in the shapeless

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² A. Harris, *The Emigrant Family* (1849) cited in Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 19.

²³ H. Kingsley, *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1901) cited in Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 90.

black clerical uniform of the time, topped by equally grubby off-white dog-collars. Both uttered their pious exhortations from lips surrounded by the same blue-black three-day-old stubble. Some of us thought this a visible sign that they considered shaving sinful.²⁴

He describes his native South Australia in the *Legend* and elsewhere as the least Australian and most British of the colonies, and he calls Adelaide the 'City of Churches' and the 'Holy City'. Queensland, on the other hand, was South Australia's opposite: the most Australian and least god-fearing of the states.²⁵

Englishmen, in Ward's imaginary world, and in that of the *Legend*, were almost always 'remittance men'. They were scheming and disloyal jackaroos, like the fictitious Sam Holt and Jimmy Sago, who cheated on their mates. Or else they were simply incompetent: 'He can't ride. He can graft a bit; but he's not much intelligence, oh no. He's an Englishman.'²⁶ The original Blind Freddy, Sir Frederick Pottinger, the 'new-chum English Baronet' policeman who could not catch the native-born bushranger Ben Hall, was his archetype.²⁷ The Australian ruling class was, in the words of old colonists, even worse, not a feudal hybrid, but a mongrel of original stamp.²⁸ It was peopled by what one American called 'mutilated Europeans'.²⁹ Elsewhere, Ward cites an early example (in 1854) of disputing the colonial notion of Britain as 'Home'. A solicitor in a Sydney court was rebuked by the police magistrate who said: 'You may call it *at home*, but we Currency Lads call it *abroad* and this is our home.'³⁰ The *Legend*, by an incredible sleight of hand, makes all Englishmen middle- and upper-class incompetents. Most English immigrants, of

²⁴ Ward, *Radical Life*, p. 35. See also Ward, *Australia*, p. 88, which quotes an anonymous source as saying that the clergy left the Australian people to 'grope amidst the gloom of sacerdotal clap-trap'.

²⁵ Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 197; Ward, *Australia*, p. 42.

²⁶ C. E. W. Bean, *On the Wool Track*, cited in Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 197.

²⁷ Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 175.

²⁸ G. Ranken (ed.), *Windabyne* (1895) cited in Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 38.

²⁹ F. J. Grund, *Aristocracy in America* (1959) cited in Ward, *Australia*, p. 52.

³⁰ C. A. Corbyn, *Sydney Revels* (1854), cited in Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 62.

course, as Russel knew full well, were lower-class, and became competent, else we would have had few Australians at all.

A careful reading of the *Legend* and Russel's later books however, uncovers other, so far hardly noticed aspects of the Wardian analysis, aspects which complicate his view of Anglo-Australian relations and attitudes, and which suggest the need for further research. Ward notes in one perceptive aside:

Since World War One home-front battles over conscription have faded into the background of consciousness it has become more and more clear to everyone that Australian patriotism does not usually or necessarily involve weakening of attachment to Britain, but rather the reverse.³¹

In the preface to his *Australia* (1965), he wrote 'few Australians now feel any sense of contradiction between their nationality and their close association with Great Britain'.³² Later in that book he calls Australia 'basically a remote, provincial British society' until after the Second World War. He identified two types of patriotism in the Australian breast, an unadulterated national one, mostly found in the Labor Party, and a 'generalized imperial, or British, patriotism', mostly found amongst the conservatives.³³ At the end of that book, which was initially written for an American audience, he asked, interestingly and perhaps uncharacteristically, whether the then new American alliance 'will prove fruitful rather than destructive, as the complex old relationship with Britain did [prove fruitful] in the past?'³⁴ This is intriguing and marks a road well understood by Ward but one ultimately not taken by him.

Other hints are there for those who care to look. The convicts' and bushmen's tendencies to nicknames were similar to those exhibited in British mining communities and in the British armed

³¹ Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 56. See also, *Australia*, pp. 101-2.

³² Ward, *Australia*, p. v.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 123. See also his 'Two Kinds of Australian Patriotism', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 41, 1970, pp. 225-43.

³⁴ Ward, *Australia*, p. 140.

services, particularly among seamen.³⁵ The democratic ideals of the 1850s stemmed, in considerable part, from British Chartism.³⁶ The constitutional debates and reforms in mid-nineteenth-century Australia may have been in advance of those in Britain but they were still arguments over essentially British-generated concerns. Hence the British Under Secretary for the Colonies, Herman Merivale, could comment of South Australia in 1856 that it had 'the only thoroughly Benthamite constitution in the world'.³⁷

We might push this further than Russel Ward does. Anyone who knows working-class and provincial Britain will recognise that many of the values identified in the legend as typically Australian have close parallels in the Mother Country itself. The British working classes lampoon the British upper classes. They, too, are suspicious of authority; they, too, are anti-intellectual; they, too, worship physical prowess (though the British upper classes also share the latter two characteristics). Just as Australians were suspicious of Britain, or rather, England, so are provincial Britons suspicious of London. Is, then, Australian patriotism of the legendary variety really just a particularly virulent strain of British provincialism and working-class consciousness?³⁸ Or perhaps of Britishness itself?

Neville Meaney has argued recently, taking in part a conscious cue from Russel Ward, that the dominant form of patriotism in

³⁵ See for example, Ward, *The Australian Legend*, pp. 78-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70; *Australia*, p. 56. This relationship has been investigated in detail in some important recent work. For example, A. Messner, 'Chartist Political Culture in Britain and Colonial Australia, c.1835-1860', PhD Thesis, UNE, 2000; P. Pickering, 'A wider field in a new country: Chartism in colonial Australia', in M. Sawyer (ed.), *Elections: Full, Free & Fair*, Sydney, 2001, pp. 28-44.

³⁷ Cited in Ward, *Australia*, p. 65.

³⁸ To begin exploring this theme look at L. Colley, *Britons: Forging an Identity*, London, 1992; T. Collins, 'Australian Nationalism and Working-Class Britishness: the Case of Rugby League Football', *History Compass*, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 2005, pp. 1-19; N. Davies, *The Isles*, London, 1999; A. Moore, 'Yorkshireness and Australia: Some Preliminary Observations', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2001, pp. 49-59; T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, London, 1977; M. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, Manchester, 1999; D. Russell, 'Sport and Identity: the Case of the Yorkshire County Cricket Club, 1890-1939', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1996, pp. 206-30; and *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, Manchester, 2004.

twentieth-century Australia was British 'race patriotism'.³⁹ We all know of Alfred Deakin's famous descriptions of Australians as 'independent Australian Britons' and of Robert Menzies' later comment that he was 'British to the boot-heels'. But, you might object, they were both Liberals. You would expect that of them. However, this was a common rhetoric on the Labor side as well. Meaney unearths an instance in 1948 of Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley describing Australia to the British as 'fully representing the British tradition and outlook'.⁴⁰ And I can add a couple of references to similar sentiments from the mouth of Chifley's Labor predecessor as Prime Minister, John Curtin. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941 Curtin's first radio broadcast in response included the words: 'we shall hold this country [Australia] and keep it as a citadel for the British-speaking race'.⁴¹ Later, in 1944, Curtin described his countrymen and women as 'seven million Britishers' and Australia as 'the bastion of British institutions ... in the southern world'.⁴² This Britishness, he explained, included Magna Carta, habeas corpus, and the right to squabble among ourselves in freely elected parliaments.⁴³ In other words, it was our British institutions which gave us the freedom to be Australians. The relationship was almost symbiotic. When watching an RAAF versus British Services cricket match played at Lord's ground in his honour during his 1944 visit to Britain, he observed that:

You Englishmen will always be able to find plenty of
Australians to defend those twenty-two yards of turf out

³⁹ N. Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 116, April 2001, pp. 76-90.

⁴⁰ Sir Norman Brook (British Cabinet Secretary) to Clement Attlee (British Prime Minister), 9 July 1948, cited in *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴¹ John Curtin, Radio Broadcast, 8 December 1941, cited in L. Ross, *John Curtin*, Melbourne, 1977, p. 242. The fact that he said 'British' rather than 'English-speaking' suggests the power of the term 'British' at that time. Nobody speaks British, of course, but Curtin and his generation of Anglo-Celts thought 'British'.

⁴² *The Times*, 1 May 1944; and John Curtin, Radio Broadcast, 7 May 1944, cited in D. Day, *John Curtin*, Melbourne, 1999, p. 543.

⁴³ Curtin's speech on receiving the Freedom of the City of London, *The Times*, 11 May 1944.

there. Lord's and its traditions belongs [*sic*] just as much to Australia as it does to England, you know.⁴⁴

And Curtin had a point. Britishness and Australian-ness are not really opposites, but first cousins with a very healthy rivalry. They are, or at least were until the 1970s, two sides of the same coin.

As Meaney points out, there was always a tension between the 'community of sentiment' and the 'community of interest' (competing trade and security demands) in colonial Britishness.⁴⁵ And this tension increased and ultimately snapped the link first with non-British mass migration and finally when Britain joined the EEC in 1973 and withdrew its forces from East of Suez at about the same time. These changes Russel Ward noticed, too, in *A Nation for a Continent*.⁴⁶ Before the 1970s Australia was in every way very much part of what historians are now calling 'the British world'.⁴⁷ Much as he probably would have denied it, Russel Ward's *Australian Legend* was quintessentially an expression and product of profound Anglo-Australian attitudes; attitudes whose historical moment, though long-lasting, has now passed. However, the legendary Australian he described is still indelibly at the core of our cultural DNA.

In his foreword to *A Radical Life*, Russel Ward includes a brief meditation on the nature of truth in human affairs: 'Until about 1970 I thought I was learning rapidly to comprehend the real nature of history and life itself. Now it is clear that the Roman governor of Judea had the right of it when he asked "What is the truth?" And stayed not for an answer'.⁴⁸ On the next page Ward reprints a fine poem written about himself by John Synott, which includes these stanzas:

44 Cited in J. Pollard, *The Complete Illustrated History of Australian Cricket*, Melbourne, 1995, p. 326.

45 Meaney, 'Britishness', pp. 84ff.

46 Ward, *Nation for a Continent*, pp. 340-8.

47 C. Bridge and K. Fedorowich (eds), *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, London, 2003.

48 Ward, *Radical Life*, p. vii.

Self contained
as old men should be,
the infamous historian
patriot of the bush
and worker of the Australian legend
embraced his themes as himself
into one stream, one destiny.
He abjured interviews,
described himself as a myth
would, in a rolling drawl,
be tough, open to interpretation.⁴⁹

Unlike many other historians, Russel Ward had, in the end, the understanding to leave his analysis open-ended, or at least to suggest that possibility. Let us all, then, salute his memory. Let us raise an imaginary glass of red to that wild colonial boy, our old mate Russel Ward – gentleman, scholar, atheist, communist – and above all, wise old bastard.

⁴⁹ J. Synott, 'Russel Ward', in *ibid.*, p. viii.