

VALE BARRY ANDREWS

Founding member of ASSH, Barry Andrews, died on May 15, this year. There were many tributes to Barry and it is appropriate that David Headon's article which appeared in The Canberra Times on May 23 is reproduced in full.

BARRY ANDREWS - AN APPRECIATION

Barry Andrews died last Friday week, on May 15, 1987. Robyn and the kids - Naomi, Luke, Rebecca and Sarah - have lost a warm, loving husband and father. Like all those who have known him, I've lost a dear friend and inspiration. Australian literature - and our culture - has lost one of its truest, most loyal sons. It will not be possible to fill the gap; as a researcher, thinker, writer (and cricket captain of distinction) he was in his prime. Irreplaceable. Let me try and tell you why.

Barry had that intangible quality given to few people, that something which marks them out. Not the cut of the brash larrikin; rather, he cared, in a quite special and infectious way, for his country and countrymen. This he conveyed to all who knew him, whether friend, colleague or, perhaps, visiting overseas writer. He was that all too rare breed of Aussie scrapper; intelligent, committed and (at times almost painfully) ethical. The few disagreements we had over the years centred on his unswerving desire to treat people, whether or not they deserved it, with dignity and decency. His life was subtle celebration. He drank of what Les Murray has called the common dish.

From the time of his graduation from the University of New South Wales in 1963, Barry worked in a variety of ways actively to combat those people whom Daniel Henry Deniehy referred to back in the 1850s as "geebungs" - locals committed to the values of England and the Old World, colonial thinkers given to whingeing and derisive comments about the native product. Arthur Phillips more recently tagged them the "cultural cringe". In the 1880s and '90s the Bulletin - the bushman's bible - decided that the best way to deal with geebung was to go on the attack, relying on satire or, more often, outright abuse to do the trick.

The Cringe persists today, but in a tempered form. In short, it's dying. Barry played a seminal, yet understated role in this; as scholar, administrator, teacher, sportsman, co-founder of ASAL (the Association for the Study of Australian Literature), and raconteur. He decided, early on it seems, that the way to counter the Cringe was not with belittling rhetoric, likely to be successful in the short term but, as the Bulletin showed, destined to failure. No, he countered with a positive stance, asserting all that is worthwhile in our rich culture. Barry had the knack of focussing attention on the most unlikely figures, affirming their value to our imaginative lives. Mick Cronin and Ginger Meggs got equal time with Henry Lawson, Patrick White and William Shakespeare. It was, truly, the labour of love of a man of wide-ranging interests.

His writings reflect this catholicity; a fine, scholarly edition of Price Warung's Tales of the Convict System; a biographical and critical study, Price Warung (William Astley); with his close friend and colleague, Bill Wilde, a bibliographical guide to colonial Australian literature, Australian Literature to 1900; with Bill and Joy Hooton, the monumental Oxford Companion to Australian Literature,

a classic within a year of its publication; two superb, exhaustive articles on Australian literature and sport (so good that all else written on the subject in the future must acknowledge their trail-blazing importance); an article on Ginger Meggs in Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends. Essays in Australian Cultural History, several articles on the 1890s; and a succession of meticulously researched entries for the Australian Dictionary of Biography (on literary, historical and sporting figures). Effectively complementing this list are his writings in smaller journals and newspapers, of a more compressed but no less perceptive kind. When the collection of B.G.Andrews's essays and occasional writings is published - and the sooner, the better - Australian culture will have a volume to rival Ian Turner's bulging, challenging Room for Manoeuvre - Writings on History, Politics, Ideas and Plays. I don't know whether Baz ever met Ian; I hope so, for I'm sure they would have had a great deal in common. An affinity of the spirit and of the red leather Kookaburra.

It's fitting that Barry's last completed article, written with Dorothy Jones, addressed the subject of "Australian Humour and Satire". It will be published in 1988 by Penguin in A New Literary History of Australia. He had a dry, almost Lawsonian sense of the comic. Next to the nameplate on his office door at the University College a few-inches-high sticker of Ginger Meggs greets students and visitor alike with a joyful yell: "Redheads rule, you betcha!" As he battled for every breath in hospital last week, you just knew he appreciated that same Carrotty Meggs - swaggering still - up there on the hospital wall alongside Graham Bond's Captain Bloody. Joy and affirmation triumphing in the most desperate circumstances, as, in the First World War, Aussie troops played cricket on Shell Green, bombs exploding around them, as a last act of defiance before leaving Anzac Cove.

Baz loved Ginger - and Eddie Coogan and Tiger Kelly, along with the Sheik of Scrubby Creek Chad Morgan, who always grinned at you from a 6 x 8 photo given prominence in his office. His office and his study at home were cultural tours-de-force. Only he could give pride of place to an appalling oil painting of Gerringong - not, demonstrably, for any intrinsic artistic merit. Rather, because one of the Parramatta Rugby League Club's favourite sons owns a pub there. The only debilitating bias he ever displayed - and that constantly - was blue and yellow. I know, speaking as a silvertail from the north side of the harbour. Next to mighty Mick Cronin's Gerringong is a poster of Stephen Mastare's Pram Factory production of Phar Lap. Though not himself a punter he warmed to his country's affinity with the turf. This led, amongst other things, to his delightful entry on the subject in the Companion, and to a short address delivered at the annual dinner of the Australian Society for Sport History. Baz gave Australia's most famous racehorse the red-carpet Dictionary of Biography treatment. Let me quote three of the paragraphs to give you an idea:

LAP, PHAR (1926-32), sporting personality, business associate of modest speculators and national hero, was born in 4 October, 1926, at Timaru, New Zealand, the second of eight children of Night Raid and his wife Entreaty, nee Prayer Wheel. The family had military connections, including Carbine and Musket (q.q.v.), although Raid himself had emigrated to Australia during the first World War.

A spindly, unattractive youth with chestnut hair, Lap was educated privately at Timaru until January, 1928, when he formed a liaison with the Sydney entertainment entrepreneur Harold Telford. With Telford, Lap moved to Sydney and established premises in the suburb Randwick. A number of short term (distance) ventures were unsuccessful, although after James E. Pike (q.v.) commenced employment and Telford became a silent partner, the business flourished. A small, dapper man who

dressed flamboyantly in multi-coloured coats and hats, Pike's nervousness caused him to lose weight before each speculation with Lap; yet their affiliation lasted for over two years and proved beneficial to hundreds of Australian investors.

Early in 1930 Lap journeyed to North America to strengthen his interests there; Telford, who disliked travelling, and Pike, who had weighty problems to contend with, stayed behind. Tall and rangy, known affectionately as 'Bobby', "The Red Terror" and occasionally as 'you mongrel', Lap died in mysterious circumstances in Atherton, California, on 5 April, 1932, and was buried in California, Melbourne, Canberra and Wellington. A linguist as well as businessman, he popularised the phrase 'get stuffed', although owing to an unfortunate accident in his youth he left no children.

It is of course, a comic triumph. Witty ironic, above all, loving. It epitomizes the man, and his deft combination of scholarship, passion and humour.

He looked like a character out of a Nat Gould story - almost roly-poly, with decided carrot features. In appearance, anything but a sportsman - but looks can be deceptive, as anyone who played with or against him in cricket, or tennis, or ping pong, or golf or . . . will agree. He left his characteristic mark of quality on three ACT Clubs - Woden Valley, Wests and ANU. I was fortunate enough to play under him with ANU 2nds in 1985-6; saw him score a wonderful 70-odd at ANU South, with a typical mixture of cuts and pulls (and on one memorable occasion a zac behind square). One interstate university team made the mistake of scoffing at BGA's unlikely physical appearance at the pre-match barbeque. He was the club's best bat, they were told, understandably, they could hardly wait to get to the ground the next day to get the slaughter over with. Baz put an artistic ton on the board before they blinked.

I first saw him bat at the nets. He fidgeted, poked, barely saw a ball, and then told the quicks bowling short to find another net. Then come game time, an entirely different story. Then, he relished all bowlers, especially the more hot-headed-youngsters bowling fast; he simply used the speed of the ball to clip them all over the paddock.

Dunroon and, now, Defence Academy students have been privileged to have Barry as a teacher and friend. He asked for little, and gave so much of himself in return. To all of us. As John Anderson put it in his moving funeral oration last Tuesday, all Barry's friends will continue to cherish their own personal memories, the ways in which he enriched our lives.

Andrews, Barry. Redheads rule, you betcha.