2024 Annual History Lecture Transcript
Making Their Mark: How Have Australians Remembered Politics
Professor Frank Bongiorno.

Stephen Gapps: 0:43
Thank you. It's now my great pleasure to introduce Professor Frank Bongiorno, who will deliver tonight's annual history lecture. Frank is Professor of History at the ANU, who is Senior Lecturer at King's College London and the University of England. He's the author of Dreamers and Schemers the 80s, and A Little History of the Australian Labor Party, amongst other things. He was until recently president of the Australian Historical Association and is president of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. And tonight Frank wonderfully engages with the topic of History Week, marking time with his question “making their political mark: how have Australians remembered politics?”

Frank Bongiorno: 1:48
I'd like to acknowledge the Gadigal people and pay my respects to Elders, people and country. I'd like to thank Uncle Alan, John Graham and Stephen Gapps for their gracious words tonight and, above all, the History Council of New South Wales for this invitation to deliver the annual history lecture. I'm a former member of the Management Committee and have been a long-term member of the History Council and so am all the more aware of the honour involved. And, of course, thanks to the museum Charchak Wing Museum for hosting us tonight. I'm going to begin my effort tonight with a fictional history, a thought experiment, I believe the philosophers call it. Perhaps I could call it a what-if or counterfactual history, to give it the gloss of respectability. Okay, it's 1928.

Frank Bongiorno: 2:42
It's 1928 and Australia's greatest sculptor, Lindsay Norman, has a big idea. He wants to carve the heads of four of Australia's greatest statesmen into a mountain that he spotted in an isolated corner of the Australian Alps on his latest honeymoon, inspired by an American mountain with a similar appellation. Mount Rushless was named in honour of Australia's laid-back ways, but it was just right for what Norman had in mind, not least because he worried that a lackadaisical people would disappear from the face of the earth unless it mended its ways. Modern art was degenerate. Peurile ideas from the old world were poisoning the national bloodstream. The manly white vigour that had made the nation expanding reach of the British race over the entire continent and even into New Guinea, it was being sapped of its virility. The nation was becoming weak and effeminate. Even its cherished racial purity was under threat in a world where covetous aliens demanded Australia open its vast open spaces to inferior races. So said Norman in his 1924 manifesto, Salvaging the Nation.

Frank Bongiorno: 4:06
So Lindsay Norman had been thinking about whose heads would need to appear on Mount Rushless William Charles Wentworth had to be there, not only because he'd become the country's greatest statesman and, of course, helped to found the University of Sydney, but because, with some companions in 1813, he'd found a way through the Blue Mountains and thereby paved the way for

the Walkins. He was a nation builder in every sense of that word. Then, of course, there was Henry Parks, the working class radical, who saw the light, moderated his opinions and became a founding father of the Commonwealth of Australia, the name, in fact, that he had wanted for the new nation. He wanted to be called a Commonwealth. Norman, who was himself originally from Victoria, also had Alfred Deakin in view. He was favoured because of his role in the making of the White Australia policy and for taking over Papua as the foundation of an Australian empire. Norman cared less, rather less, about his other supposed achievements in progressive social and economic legislation, for they'd only made Australians soft. The fourth head, however, worried Norman, giving him many a sleepless night. Now, Norman was no Labor man, far from it. He thought Labor's social legislation, rather like Deakin's, and its pretense that ordinary folk rather than talented elites made history, made for national weakness. But Norman knew that he had to find a Labor man, not least because he hoped to screw a few thousand pounds for his work out of the wealthier unions. Now the obvious labour star was Billy Hughes, and what a joy it would be to work in stone on that formidable nose. But Hughes was a hated figure among union people because he'd split the Labour Party and in any case he was still in politics. It was unseemly to put his head on Mount Rushless so clearly he wouldn't do. But then fate intervened. Fate intervened that sturdy former coal miner, Andrew Fisher, thrice Labor Prime Minister, died in London late 1928. Fisher was a Queenslander too, which was as convenient as his recent passing, and he'd done much to build the Royal Australian Navy. It had to be Fisher.

Frank Bongiorno: 6:37
Now I've invented this story, obviously an Australian adaptation of the story of Mount Rushmore, that monument in the Black Hills of Dakota. Use a Paul McCartney phrase to underline both the plausibility and unlikelihood of the story that I just told. It's plausible to the extent that so many of the ideas that had motivated Good Son Borglum's project in the United States were also shared with Australians. Both countries were the products of settler colonialism. Both celebrated their histories of territorial expansion, which they saw as synonymous with progress. Those heads on Mount Rushmore George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt were chosen for their role in expanding the continental reach of the United States, but this grand symbol of manifest destiny was built on the lands of the Sioux Nation, supposedly protected by a treaty. Now, if there'd been any similar monument in Australia, where there was no treaty at all with Indigenous peoples, the result would have been much the same. The racist, masculinist and elitist ideas that motivated Borglum's Mount Rushmore project in the United States were common enough in Australia. In the same period, borglum resisted feminist efforts to have Susan B Anthony included, and we can be sure that if there'd been an artist such as our fictional Lindsay Norman at work on the Australian project, any proposal for the inclusion of an Australian suffrage leader such as Rose Scott would surely have received similar treatment.

Frank Bongiorno: 8:18
In another respect, though, my thought experiment is quite implausible. Now, if you're old enough, if you're old enough, you might recall an advertisement that ran on television in 2001, around the time of the centenary of Federation. It featured a young boy doing his homework and asking his father the

name of the first US president. That gives dad no problem at all George Washington, head number one on Mount Rushmore. But then the boy goes on to ask the name of the first prime minister of Australia. Tough one, dad now looks a bit embarrassed. Go and ask your mother, he suggests. What kind of country would forget the name of its first prime minister? Asks the voiceover, while the boy heads off to see if mum knows the answer. We then meet a diverse range of Australians, none of whom know the first prime minister's identity.

Frank Bongiorno: 9:17
Now there are extenuating circumstances for this formidable display of historical ignorance. We are assured, and quote perhaps it's because in 1901 our nation was created with a vote, not a war, in peace, not in anger, that we take our beginnings for granted. Eventually we meet a man and woman, both elderly, who can name Edmund Barton. The boy, now perhaps enlightened by his mother, although it's not explained, returns to his father to give him the answer. Dad replies that of course he really knew that, and the son looks appropriately sceptical, as sons do.

Frank Bongiorno: 9:57
Now, just what civic purpose was being served by being able to name-check Barton is not really explained, but I guess one has to start somewhere. The slogan Australia, it's what we make it. Australia it's what we make it, perhaps reflecting uncertainty about why knowing about the past might actually matter in the present, appears on the screen at the end, with a dynamic rendition of this centenary's official logo the multicoloured outline of a stylised map of Australia, brought into existence by a kind of shooting star, although I noticed I don't know if there's an explanation for this with one too many points to be the Federation star. I don't know if that was deliberate or historical ignorance, or what. I think I got it right. It's eight, isn't it? Yeah, so there you go. I kept counting it because I thought I was getting it wrong.
But no, it is eight.

Frank Bongiorno: 10:51
The late historian John Hurst, who published the history of Federation at that time that was intended to overcome such startling ignorance, spent several pages with how Federation had failed to capture the Australian imagination, why it had been, as he said, forgotten. He had no simple answer. One reason, he suggested, was that when Australians were members of the British Empire, the history they knew and celebrated was the rise of British liberty. Once those ties were broken, said Hurst, the nation's civic consciousness became impoverished. Certainly as late as the 1950s, it was the ancient constitution, magna Carta, the civil wars and the glorious revolution that provided the most solid foundations of an Australian political history. When Labor leader Bert Evert fought his battle against the Menzies government's attempt to ban the Communist Party in 1951, his appeal was frequently to British justice and in the following year, the Australian government. Since 1952, the Australian government bought a version of Magna Carta from Britain at considerable cost over 15,000 pounds In 1988, when an Australian visit of Lincoln Cathedral's Magna Carta Lincoln has one of four copies of the original was organised by Australian expatriate clergyman Rex Davis. It was a financial failure. That did not, however, discourage the ACT branch of the Australia-Britain Society from later choosing

Magna Carta in the mid-1990s as the theme for a centenary of federation monuments in the capital, Canberra. Funding of over half a million dollars came from the British government. So we now have a Magna Carta monument and a Magna Carta place in Canberra, but I'd suggest that most Australians no longer consider this political history their political history. In fact I don't think they did in the 1990s either. Revisionist historians in the wider Anglo world, of course, have also exposed the mythologisation of Magna Carta in political efforts to craft a celebratory and expansive history of British constitutionalism and, of course, of the British Empire itself. And the 800th anniversary was fairly recently.

Now The political heroes of Australian democracy did include the odd local such as Peter Lawler, the Eureka rebel, but they were more commonly the heroes of English political and constitutional history, names such as John Hampton or John Pym, heroic figures in the struggle of the English Parliament against Charles. I will mean nothing to most Australians today, I hope probably in this room everyone knows who they are, but to most of us probably not much. But for earlier generations they were the progenitors of Australia's own political freedom. Hurst concluded his Federation study in 2000 with his own answer to the question of what kind of country does not know the name of its first prime minister. The answer, he said, is a country that is not quickly going to place Barton and Deakin alongside its real heroes, Ned Kelly, Farlap and Don Bradman, a bushranger, a horse and a cricketer. I included that one on the right Actually it's in from my last book, dreamers and Schemers, because it actually pictures Ned Kelly having taken over Graham Berry the Premier's office. It was anti-liberal, anti-graham Berry propaganda because the Kelly outbreak coincided with Victoria's great constitutional crisis of that era. So here I think Hearst's remarks record, consciously or not, those of an earlier historian, one of much more radical leanings than John Hearst, brian Fitzpatrick, who, writing in 1956, had noted that Australians had no Jeffersons and Lincolns. The Australian people made heroes of none and raised no idols, except perhaps an outlaw, ned Kelly, and Carbine a horse. Obviously in 1956 it was still Carbine and not Farlap. But there you have it. But for Fitzpatrick, that was a good thing. They had, and I quote still made of Australia a home, good enough for men of modest report to live in, calling their souls their own.

Frank Bongiorno: 15:11
Now I think the implied contrast in much of this kind of discussion of political memory is the United States allowing that it too, of course, had enjoyed a favourite Depression-era racehorse, seabiscuit. There's a long-standing impression that the US has a stronger sense of national identity than Australians and that Americans are much more engaged with their own history. It's certainly easier to find American institutions and monuments that are devoted to promoting and approved versions of the nation's history. A notable example, of course, is the Presidential Library. In his book Presidential Temples how Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory, Benjamin Hufbauer argues that these grand institutions beginning with the first devoted to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1940, reflect the growing power of the office of president itself, the tendency towards an imperial presidency. They are about how power and I'm quoting from him here how power is remembered and how these constructed memories of power shape contemporary and future presidential authority. I've put that

one up there because it's the only one I've visited. It's the LBJ one in Austin, Texas, and then you can head out of town and go to the LBJ Ranch as well, if you like, in the Hill Country.

Frank Bongiorno: 16:33
Australia has followed to some extent in establishing a series of prime ministerial libraries and centres. These are devoted to Alfred Deakin, John Curtin, Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, John Howard and, the most recently established, Robert Menzies. There's also a Malcolm Fraser collection within the University of Melbourne archives which approaches, I think, prime Ministerial Library status. In Australia, all Prime Ministerial Libraries are located within universities which can, as we all know, generate their own financial vulnerabilities, and Gideon Hay, writing some years ago, wondered how willing they were likely to be to ask really hard questions about the subjects to which they were devoted. By way of contrast, in the United States, each former president pursues large-scale philanthropic support for their own library I noticed an article just today on the Barack Obama one and they have a hand in its creation, and the National Archives and Records Administration plays a central part in the administration of the whole system. So they're necessarily central to critical research on their respective subjects.

Frank Bongiorno: 17:39
Presidential libraries - libraries more generally - are in a much stronger position, I think, to shape historical consciousness and collective memory than their Australian counterparts. They're much smaller Australian counterparts. Perhaps in this field, as in other aspects of our national life, we've been too enthusiastic in a desire to follow an American model. Prime Ministers are not presidents, and the leadership churn of recent years would have been a great boon to the building industry and the CFMEU, of course, if every Prime Minister were to have a library. The British scholar, Michael Billig, coined a term that can help us, I think, understand some of the things I'm exploring tonight banal nationalism, the hardly noticed, taken for granted ways that communities express their national identity. And it involves processes of both remembering and forgetting inclusion and exclusion. Even as the boundaries shift with changing values I guess that's one of my themes tonight. Those boundaries have shifted over the years.

Frank Bongiorno: 18:41
Who belongs, who doesn't, for example, we have as the Americans do with their presidents, sometimes place the faces of Australian prime ministers on our stamps. We name federal electoral divisions, Canberra suburbs and the odd country town university road building bridge after our politicians. The renaming of the Victorian federal electorate of Batman as Cooper and of Murray as Nicholls after the Yorta Yorta men and Aboriginal political activists William Cooper and Doug Nicholls, expresses an expanded sense of what practising politics has meant in this country. All the same, Australia has only begun, I think, the process of honouring the rich traditions of Indigenous political activity in public ways. One place they do figure is in the oral and visual record, and I'm thinking here, for instance, of Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly's celebration of the struggles of the Gurindji for better wages and their land in. From little things, big things grow. A political story also, of course, powerfully evoked in Mervyn Bishop's photograph of Gough Whitlam pouring sand into

Vincent Lingiari's hand. In fact, a reversal of a ceremony that John Batman was said to have performed in Melbourne in the mid-1830s, even if that was apparently staged the coloured one that is for better effect after the actual ceremony, I think the one on the left captured by an activist, was as it was actually happening.

Frank Bongiorno: 20:20
Political memory happens informally too. It's rooted in folk life, in culture and in conversation. My former doctoral student and esteemed colleague, Emily Gallagher, has uncovered children's engagement with everyday politics in their imaginative play, their writing and drawing, for instance. There you have. This is Mr Hawke's house. Mr Hawke is in the hospital from the Hawke papers over in Adelaide University of South Australia. Another of my students, Gary Humphries, a former Liberal parliamentarian, recalls a rhyme that his mother taught him about the political leaders of the day, which was a product of the streets of Leichhardt in the 1930s Leng Leng, brave and bold, Orteby Orteby dipped in gold. Stephen Stevens bah bah bah. Orteby Orteby dipped in tar.

Frank Bongiorno: 21:17
Folklorists have drawn attention to the rich tradition of protest song, of playground rhyme and, of course, political graffiti. And today we need to consider the online world, where memory of Julia Gillard's prime ministership, now global, will likely be dominated forevermore by her famous misogyny speech, I should say always at hand, of course, on YouTube. It lacks that ephemerality of a playground rhyme that sits there in people's memories and then, of course, often doesn't. The intersection of the official and the popular can in unpredictable ways generate, I think, rich political memory names of prominent leaders sometimes attached to a whole period, as in phrases such as the Menzies era or the Whitlam era. That even happens at the state level, such as Queensland's Bjorki-Peterson era. There the political landmark of the commission of inquiry into possible illegal activities and associated police misconduct a mouthful of unlikely material, one would have thought for political memory now works in historical consciousness through casual references to the commissioner, Tony Fitzgerald. Before Fitzgerald and after Fitzgerald are common phrases in Queensland still, and they're rich in an imagery that extends well beyond what we usually think of as politics. A contemporaneous bicentennial event Expo 88, is sometimes recalled alongside Fitzgerald, as when Queensland came of age or Brisbane sometimes came of age, it stopped being just a country, town and so on. After Fitzgerald was also after Expo.

Frank Bongiorno: 23:08
Some institutions have as their very mission the shaping of political memory. That's true of the National Archives of Australia. It's eventually an unsuccessful legal battle with Jenny Hocking over release of the palace letters is a reminder, I think, of how reliant we are on access to original documents if we're to undertake honest, well-informed appraisal of our political history. With better funding in recent years, as well as improved relations with researchers, hopefully the National Archives has turned a corner. The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House also seeks to shape understandings of both the political past and the possibilities of our democratic political system, as democracy around the world, and even sometimes at home, has been subjected

to assault in recent years. It's assumed that is, the museum has assumed a more active role in civics education.

Frank Bongiorno: 24:01
There are also local institutions that play a role in this sort of space. Ballarat has its Prime Minister's Avenue, an assembly of busts in that city's botanical gardens. If you might have seen it, that gold rush city, that golden city, has long had, I think, a keen sense of its own national importance as a place that, through the Eureka uprising, a much mythologised political event in its own right, represents itself as the cradle of Australian democracy. The original commissioning and funding of Prime Minister's Avenue came from Richard Crouch, a local politician who'd been both a Liberal and a Labor parliamentarian at different times. The City Council provided funding for a time, but there's now a philanthropist, the local resident, once again paying the bills and possibly looking nervously at national political opinion polls. As I speak, the site has also been one of protest. An environmental activist group installed Colmo in May 2022 during the election campaign, but I understand he survived only a few hours before being taken away by officials.

Frank Bongiorno: 25:16
Ballarat, I think, should remind us that collective memory is also collective. Forgetting Eureka has a place in the stories Australians tell themselves about the evolution of their democracy. Yet, as Claire Wright has shown, women's role has long been underestimated or even ignored in an overwhelmingly blokey national legend and history. Nor is their collective memory of the demonstrations of Chinese diggers in the 1850s on the Victorian goldfields against discriminatory taxation, which of course you know was sort of the issue at the heart of Eureka as well, and you know these campaigns enjoyed some success. We recall in mainstream history the sufferings and oppressions of the goldfields Chinese, but not their brave and resourceful resistance. That sits, I think, alongside our failure to appreciate the deep history of deliberative forms of decision making among Australia's Indigenous people. We still, I think, fail often to see those as an integral part of the story of democracy in this country.

Frank Bongiorno: 26:20
Forgetting can be facilitated by literal destruction, whether by design, greed or indifference. The earlwood home in which john howard grew up is now the site of a kfc, and the bankstown fibro in which the young paul keating lived was demolished to build units. More recently, the deacon holiday home, bellara at point lonsdale, has been the subject of a campaign led by deacon descendant and liberal party identity tom har against a decision by the relevant Victorian planning authority to allow its subdivision. By way of contrast, the Chifley's Modest Home in Bathurst has been a house museum since the 1970s and the Curtin's Home in Cottesloe, Perth is available for short stay accommodation. That hardly turns it into a national shrine. But Cottesloe, Perth is available for short-stay accommodation. That hardly turns it into a national shrine. But it is better, I suppose, than a Zinger burger and chips.

Frank Bongiorno: 27:14

Perhaps we're getting a little better in these matters. There's a recent and successful campaign for the heritage listing of the building that housed Elsie Women's Refuge, the country's first, honours and preserves a site of great significance for Australian women and the feminist movement. The work of Michelle Arrow here tonight has shown how efforts such as this one, that is, the founding of Elsie back in 1974, exemplified the personal becoming. The political matters - such as domestic violence, excluded from the public sphere, were drawn into everyday politics through feminist action. Elsie, a Glebe property occupied in 1974 by a group of Sydney feminists including Anne Summers, Jennifer Dacres and Bessie Guthrie, is as much a site of political life as any parliamentary chamber and cabinet room.

Frank Bongiorno: 28:03
Prime ministerial homes have fared better.

Frank Bongiorno: 28:05
In more recent times, the Morrison government provided funds for the purchase and preservation of the home where Bob Hawke lived as a child in Bordertown, South Australia.

Frank Bongiorno: 28:14
Like the Curtin's home that short stay accommodation you can see what they're doing here. It's good, self-sustaining stuff. Recently, though, through a marvellous initiative led by former New South Wales Premier Barry Unsworth, some Labor identities in the city banded together to raise the million dollars needed to buy the former Whitlam family home at 32 Albert Street, Cabramatta, when it came up for sale. The Morrison government subsequently provided $1.3 million to support that effort, and it's a lovely 20th century modernist home that doubled as a de facto electorate office for the young but fast rising western sydney mp, and it was also where, of course, the family and friends and labour supporters celebrated the party's famous victory in the 1972 election. It was there in the backyard, and, and just as the Chifley House Museum works as a reminder of the lifestyle of the respectable provincial working class at that time, the Wickham's Place, designed by local architect Roy Appleton, registers something, I think, of the continuing modesty of middle-class taste. Former Prime Minister, of course, staff and travel entitlements at the public expense after they retire.

Frank Bongiorno: 29:27
One way it needs to be mentioned, I think that these facilities are used is to attend to that particular leader's legacy. They might draw on the research and administrative capacities of their office to produce memoirs or interventions in political debate. Paul Keating, for instance, has made regular statements not only on urban planning in Sydney but on superannuation policy and Australian foreign policy, especially China China relations matters, I think, on which he sees his own prime ministerial legacy as at stake. The phenomenon of the political memoir is beyond the scope of what I can say tonight, but my colleague Josh Black, who we saw up here earlier tonight, has explored how memoirs and the wider context of media coverage, book tours, literary festivals have promoted particular understandings and images of Australian politics. The more successful of them, such as Bob Hawkes and John Howards, have been widely read, and the most sensational, such as Labor

power broker Graham Richardson's Whatever it Takes and Labor leader Mark Latham's the Latham Diaries, have contributed to a wider cynicism. Whatever it Takes the phrase has become a description of a certain way of doing politics one, I think, that most of us dislike politics. One, I think that most of us dislike.

Frank Bongiorno: 30:48
Certain television documentaries have reinforced this image of politics Labour in Power screened in 1993, and arguably the most accomplished of them, still paid attention to personal rivalry as a dynamic. But the wider story was a serious effort by Labour in the 80s to transform the nation and the Labor Party along with that. The more recent documentaries the Howard Years, the Killing Season and Nemesis were each accomplished examples of documentary filmmaking. But they represented well, they presented recent Australian political history in a rather more sinister light. I think recent Australian political history in a rather more sinister light. I think Personal ambition overshadowed policy. In Nemesis the camera work with its use of empty, semi-darkened rooms for interviews hinted at danger, as if even now someone might emerge from the shadows to stab a political rival in the back. It reminded me of one of those final scenes they used to include in James Bond films. You know the ones where the sort of the sidekick knick-knack, you know in one of them would sort of, you know, do a final attack just when you thought all the drama was over. It was not always thus. I mean through the 1970s and 80s there was a boom in fictionalised accounts of Australian history in the form of live theatre feature films and television miniseries, fueled by both the cultural nationalism of the era and the tax laws of the era, which generously rewarded investors. There were dozens of them. Notable films dealt with aspects of Australian politics, such as Philip Noyce's Newsfront in 1978. But political history really found its genre, I think, in the multi-part television series.

Frank Bongiorno: 32:30
Any Australian viewing these programs would have received something like an extended course in national history, although possibly not one that would pass muster in a high school classroom or university lecture hall. By the time True Believers, a 1988 drama about Australian politics, appeared on our screens, I was a 19-year-old history student at the University of Melbourne and I found even the advertisements of the program so risible that I refused to watch it. Now I've done so more recently. This is the joys of streaming, of course, which my daughter actually put on our television recently instead of just on our computers. So we're making big progress in our house. So I watched it and I must confess I was entertained, informed, occasionally moved, amid, I have to say, quite a few laugh out loud moments. The program is high melodrama with a decided leftward slant, to put it mildly.

Frank Bongiorno: 33:28
The eight part series begins with John Curtin on his deathbed, with Ben Chifley present to accept the mantle, reluctantly, it's emphasised, since reluctance to set yourself apart from your mates is a labour way of doing things, and Chifley is the quintessential labour bloke that's followed by a lot of old suits and hats and generous applications of brill cream, with the occasional homely wife, sassy

journalist and devoted secretary thrown in to this very manly world. It's a very chaste world too. No one seems to be having an affair, you'll be pleased to hear. It's a very chaste world too. No one seems to be having an affair, you'll be pleased to hear. Chifley, played by Ed Devereaux, of Skippy fame. Well, people of a certain generation anyway, is the salt of the earth, the kind of bloke anyone would want as their uncle. While Bert Everett is brilliant, thrusting and unstable Childlike, I think, rather than villainous, Bob Menzies, extravagantly eyebrowed, is appropriately ruthless and although not without, you know, compassion and principle, these cannot outdo his opportunism. Bob Santa Maria, the Catholic activist, is a zealot with mad eyes who seems more to me in the show, more like a dangerous cult leader than the amiable fellow of later times inquiring of viewers. How do you do on a Sunday morning? On his show point of view, true Believers was just one of many such programs.

Frank Bongiorno: 34:54
The dismissal screened in 1983, when memory of the sacking of the government was still raw and Labor just made it back into office. You know, really, I think, suggested a sense of lineage. The very first episode was the 6th of March. The screening of it was the 6th of March 1983, the Sunday after Bob Hawke's election victory. Labor-aligned lobbyist David Coombe was annoyed when his new friend Valery Ivanov, the Soviet diplomat unknown to Coombe, a KGB spy, arrived at his Canberra residence for a chat just as Coombe was settling down to watch the dismissal. If there was, I think, any sense of a lineage between Whitlam and Hawke being evoked in the screening of the dismissal at this moment, the rightward course of the new Hawke government, which in the coming months had to grapple with the Coombe Ivanov affair, would soon dispel that impression.

Frank Bongiorno: 35:51
The dismissal works as a story of grand ambitions, thwarted ideals and flawed visionaries, a story told against the background of Vivaldi's Four Seasons pleasant Canberra scenery, relentless conservative bastardry and the bumbling of a Governor-General who seems almost single-handedly to be propping up the nation's whisky industry. Land of Hope in 1986 told an even more ambitious Labor story, extending from the strikes of the 1890s and the founding of the Labor Party through to the Whitlam election victory. Eureka in 1983 was notable in finding a prominent place for women in the story of that uprising. The Last Bastion, screened in 84 as well efficiently covered the defence of Australia from the Japanese under the admirable Curtin Labor government. Now, what was happening here was the rise to cultural power of the creatives who'd first come into their own in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Whitlam generation. I guess Bob Ellis is there scribbling away on several of them and David Williamson was behind the last bastion.

Frank Bongiorno: 36:56
Mother was Britain, and young Australia needed to throw off her overbearing influence. But there was an older, bigger, more powerful and rather ruthless relative waiting in the wings when Uncle Sam was not suspected of killing our best racehorses, as in Farlap. He was pulling us into immoral and unwinnable wars, as in the miniseries Vietnam, or else menacing our national soul, as in Newsfront, if the left seem to be winning the culture wars, as each of these films and programs rolled off the assembly line and onto our screens, the environment of recent years has been a rather more sharply

contested one. Oddly, a rather old-fashioned bearer of collective history has taken much of the brunt the statue or monument. Some statues, including here in Sydney, have been vandalised or graffitied, although, unlike in Britain, at least so far as I'm aware, none has yet been dumped in the sea With the authority's approval, they've occasionally been moved or removed, or they've been reinterpreted through new inscriptions. Yet, despite the movement against statues seen to be entangled in the brutal history of colonisation, they're also still being erected In Victoria. A Kenned-era initiative designated the threshold for a Victorian premier to have a statue as 3,000 days. I don't know how they came up with that, but the result has been a nice mix. We have the country party's Albert Dunstan, the Liberal's Henry Balty, dick Hamer from the Liberal Party and Labor's John Cain Jr. - Daniel Andrews is qualified. So we watch this space. I guess Geoff Kennett did not.

Frank Bongiorno: 38:38
In Sydney, the 2013 Hyde Park statue of Lachlan Macquarie was a rather bizarre late entrance into the country's monumental history, made even more peculiar by the choice of an extract from an obituary in a Tasmanian newspaper as the statue's inscription paying tribute to a perfect gentleman, a Christian and supreme legislator of the human heart. Future sculptors, it's said, would imagine a guardian angel. But historians have now, including Stephen Gapps, who, we've heard from tonight, have now had much to say about Macquarie's previously neglected role in the frontier wars, now, in the ordinary course of events and outside such controversy, most of us probably barely notice statues. The first I remember taking any notice of was that of Tommy Bent. Now, that's what my parents called him. He was always Tommy Bent and if you were driving through the genteel suburb of Brighton in Melbourne, Tommy was hard to miss at the busy intersection of Bay Street and the Pean Highway. Tommy was a man connected in my mind with weekends and beaches and my father and this is very appropriate from what we've heard about toilets tonight, because my father always, always had a dad joke to share about Tommy Bent and it persistently involved old Tommy having to come down to visit the loo, and I thought that was hilarious.

Frank Bongiorno: 40:00
The statue of Tommy - actually Sir Thomas Bent - Premier of Victoria from 1904 until 1909, the year of his death has been perched on a granite pedestal of 12 feet since 1913. The statue itself, accompanied by a small drinking fountain, is a further nine and a half feet tall. A press report of the dedication called it an excellent likeness, big, presumably. The commission, supported by public donations, went to a female sculptor, Margaret Baskerville. The Melbourne Argus believed this was the first time in Australia that a woman had received such a commission.

Frank Bongiorno: 40:37
Now, bent, of course, is a fine example of nominative determinism. Bent by name, bent by nature, is the accurate and telling subtitle of Margaret Glass's biography. He'd have kept teams of ICAC investigators permanently employed, seamlessly combining the role of Minister for Railways with Land Boomer, relentlessly exploiting his political clout to enrich himself. Bent was so bent that he was even accused of deeds that he was unlikely to have committed. Notoriously, the theft of the splendid Victorian parliamentary mace, which went missing in 1891, has never been found. There

were claims it was later used in a bizarre pseudo-parliamentary ritual in a local brothel. Bent, a married man, did assault one of his many reputed girlfriends. The case mysteriously disappeared, settled out of court.

Frank Bongiorno: 41:36
Graham Davison reminds us that monumental history's role is to celebrate, honour and commemorate, not to analyse or explain. And that's true here. Monuments generally don't remember bruised women or fleeced investors, certainly not those in this heroic tradition. And statues do often lie. They proclaim the deeply flawed as flawless. The slaver becomes the philanthropist, the crook and the thug as the model of the self-made man.

Frank Bongiorno: 42:04
Now it's easy to satirise, of course, the heroic tradition of statuary. A group of Ormond College students at Melbourne University in the 1980s did just that with a politician named George Evers. Now, evers was a minor local worthy who belonged to a family that included many other minor local worthies also honoured with statues around Carlton. Once a year, the students faithfully made a pilgrimage to his monument in Royal Parade, listened to a speech by a distinguished person they selected for the occasion and then they would return to college for the George Evers dinner. Sadly, unlike the Evers statues themselves, the tradition did not endure Satire and tradition, like protest, is more fragile and ephemeral than men in stone. That's possibly because stone endures that we so worry over it.

Frank Bongiorno: 42:58
Recent campaigns have sought better representation of women in Sydney. There's been an effort led by Catherine Franey, who's here tonight, and Julie Bates, a sex worker activist, to secure the return of Joy, a statue of a sex worker, to the city of Sydney. The Louis Fraser sculpture was briefly in Darlinghurst in the mid-90s before being moved to Macquarie University after some objections from locals. Now Joy may be on her way home as a replica, because Macquarie wants. After some objections from locals. Now Joy may be on her way home as a replica because Macquarie wants to keep the original. But here, I think, is another battle over politics and history. Are sex workers' rights and history to be acknowledged publicly, openly, or are they to be tucked away safely on a campus in North Ryde? As the result of another campaign by a monument of one's own, the name of the group, Zelda Di Prano, who campaigned for equal pay and chained herself to the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne in 1969, is now represented by a life-size bronze outside Trades Hall in Carlton, Melbourne.

Frank Bongiorno: 44:01
In Canberra, sculptor Liz Johnson's, Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney both entered Parliament in 1943, were recently unveiled and, of course, the timing was poignant the Parliament had been exposed as an unsafe place for women. Lyons and Tangney arguably stand as a response to the Peter Corlett statue of Curtin and Chifley making their way from the Hotel Currajong to Parliament House. They amble along like any other yarning mates, every man in a society that likes to think of

itself as laid-back and egalitarian. Corlett also sculpted Menzies, who walks alone by Lake Burley Griffin, evoking his party's individualism, perhaps Adjacent to what is called Robert Menzies' Walk. This statue, commissioned in 2012, I think makes a more explicit connection with the development of Canberra itself. The lake, of course, was built during the Menzies' era.

Frank Bongiorno: 44:52
Since the 1990s, the Liberals have done more to attend to their own party's history. Menzies' The Forgotten People broadcast. His eloquent 1942 celebration of the middle class now features regularly in Liberal Party discourse, which those concerns sometimes inflate into a philosophy. The words are, of course, no more a philosophy than Ben Chifley's Light on the Hill, or indeed the phrase true believers, taken up in Labor circles in the wake of the television series mentioned earlier, most famously, of course, by Paul Keating on Election Night 1993.

Frank Bongiorno: 45:26
For the labour-leaning Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke have acquired a kind of modern folk hero status alongside older heroes such as Curtin and Chifley, and they probably now overshadow those older ones. Whereas for Whitlam, collective memory once seemed tightly bound to the dismissal, it's been different, I think, in the last decade or so. His death in 2014 became an occasion for reflection on the expansive possibilities and achievements of the Whitlam government when compared with the more straightened politics of our own times. A popular memory of the Whitlam government is one in which he's seen as responsible for getting one a university education, I think, particularly for women, and whether that's literally true or not, it functions as a certain kind of political memory, an intersection of ordinary people's lives with the wider world of politics. For Hawke, whose government reintroduced fees for tertiary education, collective remembrance is more centred on personality. The reformed larrikin who was said to have had a love affair with the Australian people, John Howard, is probably as close as the right has to a modern folk hero comparable with these figures, and that famous tracksuit of his remains evocative of a kind of affectionate dagginess. Others, such as Scott Morrison, have tried to win hearts as well as votes, but have failed.

Frank Bongiorno: 46:47
Still, it's worth pausing over the way certain policies of the Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Howard governments have come to do symbolic work of a kind surely unanticipated at the time of their inception.

Frank Bongiorno: 47:00
Whitlam's abolition of university fees now overshadows in memory aspects of his government's legislative achievement that he and his colleagues regarded as far more important at the time. Fraser has been reimagined, especially, but not only, in the Vietnamese community, as the friend of the refugee, not the big bad male of the dismissal. Kerr's Medicare an early hawkier achievement and gun laws, the product of Howard's first term, now contribute to Australians' differentiation of themselves from Americans. These reforms have grown in stature as other reforms have shrunk, disappeared or, in the case of several of the much vaunted reforms of the 1980s and 90s, those

economic reforms have become connected with the contraction of social opportunity, widening inequality. We're also more conscious, I think, than a generation or two ago, of Australia's fair electoral administration. Its compulsory voting and preferential voting is points of difference with other countries. Democracy sausage, synonymous with peaceful Saturday voting in community spaces as a citizen's basic duty, now embodies a distinctive historical experience and perhaps even a national identity. Australians today, I suggest, are no longer as reluctant as they were even a generation ago about making their political mark.

Stephen Gapps: 48:22
Thank you, Thank you so much, frank. I know that Frank had me going about Mount Rushless for a moment. They're so believable and I just wonder. I know that there's a lot of Blue Mountains historians here tonight and I wonder if I have a vague memory of several proposals for faces to be carved in the Blue Mountains. Can anyone confirm that?

Stephen Gapps: 48:59
Okay, so a most important part of the evening is to thank the support of our cultural partners and the New South Wales government through Create New South Wales, as well as our annual History Week festival every September. How many other programs and services would not be possible without these. The Chau Chak Wing Museum for the use of the venue tonight, and I'd like to thank our annual awards subcommittee, associate Professor Jan Lanicek, Associate Professor Julie McIntyre, Dr Naomi Parry-Duncan, and for all their hard work and commitment in the awards process and judging, and our events subcommittee, most capable to be chaired by Jesse Adam Stein. I'd also like to thank all our annual history awards sponsors, our 10 general councillors, 11 cultural partners for the tremendous ongoing support. I'd like to thank members and member organisations who are at the heart of everything we do in the council and, to finish up, to thank our history council team, Catherine Shirley, Amanda Wells, Lauren Chater and Katrina Dubé for all their hard work through the year in producing this event tonight. If everyone would give everyone there a thank you.