

Margaret Kiddle: The writing of *Men of Yesterday* and the Melbourne School of History

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Abstract: *Margaret Loch Kiddle (1914-1958) is best remembered for Men of yesterday: a social history of the western district of Victoria 1834-1890. This classic example of Australian historiography was published posthumously in 1961. Set against the background of the writing of Men of Yesterday, this paper seeks to establish Kiddle as a central figure in Crawford's Melbourne School of History, a role which is highlighted by examination of her interactions with Crawford, Manning Clark, Geoffrey Serle and Russel Ward. Kiddle was a female historian who worked in an overwhelmingly masculine profession. Kiddle's intellectual and personal relationships with Crawford and other prominent academics of her generation are apparent through a close reading of archival resources, and place her in the midst of the Melbourne School of History during this era when the tradition of modern Australian historical writing was established.*

Keywords: *Margaret Kiddle, Max Crawford, Geoffrey Serle, Manning Clark, Russel Ward, Noel Butlin, historiography, women's history, Melbourne School of History, University of Melbourne, Australian National University*

"I'll never know whether it's been worth doing."¹ - Kiddle 1983.

Margaret Kiddle (1914-1958) academic, historian and children's author, is best known for *Men of Yesterday: a social history of the Western District of Victoria, 1834-1890* published posthumously in 1961. Her work and ultimately her life, were

¹ Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday : A Social History of the Western District of Victoria, 1834-1890*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983), ix.

restricted by illness. In true biographical tradition, Kiddle suffered a “good death” at an early age.² Kept alive in her final days by dialysis machines, her dying ambition was to see the last words of her manuscript written.³ Her work *Men of Yesterday* brought to life the generation of landed gentry that had settled the land in a grand and elaborate style before the discovery of gold and land reform ended their glorious era. Kiddle became the first historian to chronicle their brief ascendancy.

With an academic life based at the University of Melbourne, and a Research Fellowship at the Australian National University, Kiddle was one of the few women who worked amidst the post-World War II boom in Australian history writing. Margaret Kiddle counted Manning Clark, Russell Ward, Max Crawford, Geoffrey Serle and John La Nauze among her friends and left behind a collection of personal papers that give a unique view of life within the academy during the 1940s and 50s.

The ten-year effort to see *Men of Yesterday* through to completion despite serious illness was documented in forensic detail within Kiddle’s correspondence, research notes and diary entries. The writing of the last words of the manuscript coincided with the end of Margaret Kiddle’s life. *Men of Yesterday* was released to critical praise that was undermined by rumours of major revision and editing after Kiddle’s death. Patricia Grimshaw and Jane Carey have traced the source of these claims to John La Nauze and refuted them.⁴

This classic work of regional history brought focus to a previously neglected era of historical writing in Australia. A close examination of her efforts to complete *Men of Yesterday* reveals Kiddle to be a central figure of the Crawford era Melbourne School of History.

Golden Tree of Life Historian

Kiddle’s early and somewhat dramatic death has perhaps overshadowed her work. Details of her last hours are documented by Russel Ward in his autobiography, *A Radical Life*:

² “Readers want it and demand it (a ‘good death’),” Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) 289, 91.

³ Russel Ward, *A Radical Life : The Autobiography of Russel Ward* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1988), 229

⁴ Patricia Grimshaw and Jane Carey, "Foremothers VI: Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1905–1990), Margaret Kiddle (1914–1958) and Australian History after the Second World War," *Gender & History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 366.

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Towards the end she could only be kept alive being harnessed to a hospital machine, which continually recycled the blood her kidney could no longer handle. Her doctor, her brother-in-law, told me of her death. Her bed covered by a welter of research notes, papers and books, she wrote the last words of the manuscript, said to him, 'Now turn that thing off', turned her face to the wall and died.⁵

These words written by Ward—perhaps with some dramatic licence—cast Kiddle as a writer racing against her own mortality to complete her manuscript before death arrived. This vision of Kiddle was also adopted by Manning Clark, who in his own indomitable style described her as a “golden tree of life historian” due to her shortened lifespan: “We were hanging out the washing together in Canberra when she told me. It was clear then she knew I knew, and I knew she knew I knew, and we had another unspoken bond of love for someone who had died.”⁶ The linkage between early death and posthumous publication are inexorable. Margaret Kiddle died in May 1958 at the age of 43. The manuscript, *Men of Yesterday*, was published by Melbourne University Press in 1961. From Max Crawford’s heartfelt preface, to the author biography on the back cover flap, the tome is encased with the irrefutable facts surrounding her death. The dramatic circumstances regarding the completion of *Men of Yesterday* are usually signposted wherever Kiddle or *Men of Yesterday* warrant a mention. Ward provides a perfect case in point: despite a long personal and professional association with Kiddle; a person he had acknowledged in the foreword to *The Australian Legend* for her supervision and encouragement of his work at the Australian National University, it was the dramatic details of Kiddle’s death to which Ward devoted limited autobiographical space.

Insight into the writing of *Men of Yesterday* can be found through Kiddle’s preparation for death, leaving details that may never have been possible otherwise. The author’s impending death reveals the life of the manuscript. It is within the copious amounts of papers and letters detailing research discoveries and editorial decisions made, that the very essence of the manuscript can be found. The inner story of *Men of Yesterday* reveals the extent of Kiddle’s interactions with key

⁵ Ward, *A Radical Life : The Autobiography of Russel Ward*, 230.

⁶ Manning Clark, "Writing History in Australia," in *Occasional Writings and Speeches* (Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1980), 24.

members of the famed Melbourne School of History. It indicates the extent of her involvement with their working and their personal lives and revealing it to be far greater than any biography of Manning Clark, Max Crawford or Geoffrey Serle has suggested.

The Melbourne School of History is best known for its activity under Max Crawford after he was appointed Professor of History in 1937. In the subsequent decades the Melbourne School of History grew substantially. Members of the School and their associates pioneered the writing of Australian history through a more rigorous use of primary sources and a newfound nationalist sentiment.⁷ As a Master of Arts student in 1939, with philanthropist Caroline Chisholm as the subject of her thesis, Kiddle was the first of Crawford's students to research Australian history.⁸ As Department head, Max Crawford successfully lobbied the University for additional staff to ease the burden of the existing staff in the post-war years. Kiddle was appointed to work for the Department of History at the University of Melbourne in February 1946. Her employment corresponded with completion of her interrupted Master of Arts thesis on Caroline Chisholm. Margaret's recruitment into the expanding Department of History meant her career as an academic, albeit an untenured female, had begun.

The appointment of Kiddle to the Department of History occurred at a time of great expansion for University of Melbourne enrolments. Returning servicemen and women contributed to an increase in history enrolments, with the student numbers in 1946 swelling from 950 to a projected 1443.⁹ Officially employed as a part time tutor, Kiddle initially acted as Crawford's research assistant. Her starting part-time salary was £150 per annum; this compares favourably with an average wage of £210 for females in full-time employment during 1945.¹⁰

⁷ Graeme Davison et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), 425.

⁸ Fay Anderson, *An Historian's Life : Max Crawford and the Politics of Academic Freedom*, MUP Academic Monograph Series (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 162.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *University of Melbourne, Department of History Staff Appointments 1947-1954, 8 May 1946.* Staff Establishments Memo. Series Accession. No. 1975.0033, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne; T. Sheridan, *Division of Labour: Industrial Relations in the Chifley Years, 1945-49* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989), 262.

Thank heaven I am not trying to get anywhere in the academic jungle

Although Kiddle would never rise above the level of Senior Tutor, her academic skills received recognition in the form of twelve months' paid study leave to undertake research for *Men of Yesterday* in the United Kingdom in 1952. In the following year, Kiddle was approached by Laurence Fitzhardinge, Reader in the Sources of Australian History at the newly established ANU, to help build the University's school of Australian History. A placement of three to five years as a Visiting Fellow was offered to Kiddle, who would only agree to a term of twelve months.¹¹ While chronic illness is likely to have been a contributing factor in her lack of professional academic promotion, Kiddle dismissed the idea: "Thank heaven I am not trying to get anywhere in the academic jungle – though I have a shrewd suspicion that if I ever did want to my squatter ancestry would get me there – nature red in tooth and claw."¹² Her words suggested no outward issues surrounding gender or health, at least none that Kiddle was willing to admit. In the immediate post-War era few females held appointments in university history departments.¹³ When a contemporary of Kiddle, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, was promoted to associate professor of History at the University of Melbourne in 1948, she became the first female in a non-scientific department, to achieve such an Australian university rank.¹⁴

The parallels between Kiddle and Kathleen Fitzpatrick are worthy of consideration.¹⁵ Fitzpatrick had good health on her side and would ultimately outlive Kiddle by over forty years. Like Kiddle, Fitzpatrick enjoyed ongoing work in this male-dominated profession. By 1958, the year of Kiddle's death, Fitzpatrick had risen to Associate Professor of History at the University of Melbourne before opting for early retirement in 1962. Some believed Fitzpatrick deserved appointment as second chair at Melbourne over John La Nauze. There was time for Fitzpatrick to write her own childhood reminisces in the well-received *Solid Bluestone Foundations* (1983), along with her most notable histories *Sir John Franklin in Tasmania, 1837-1843* (1949) and

¹¹ Fitzhardinge, L., to Kiddle, 27 May 1953, Letter. Series 952/5b/1a, MS 8637. *Margaret Loch Kiddle, Papers Ca. 1937 to Ca. 1965*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

¹² *Personal Correspondence to R. M. Crawford, Kiddle to Crawford, 1 June 1955*. Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 17, Series 7/ 27, *Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection*.

¹³ Grimshaw and Carey, "Foremothers Vi: Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1905–1990), Margaret Kiddle (1914–1958) and Australian History after the Second World War," 352.

¹⁴ S. Davies, "Kathleen Fitzpatrick: Sculptor with Words" in *The Discovery of Australian History 1890-1939*, ed. S Macintyre and J Thomas (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 192.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

the commissioned history of the *Presbyterian Ladies' College PLC Melbourne: the first century, 1875-1975* (1975). Letters exchanged with Manning Clark were published posthumously as *Dear Kathleen, Dear Manning: The Correspondence of Manning Clark and Kathleen Fitzpatrick 1949-1990*.¹⁶ Those extra decades allowed Fitzpatrick to memorialize her own part in the Crawford-era Melbourne School.

Perhaps it may be the best thing I ever have to give anyone

Three years after commencing work at the University of Melbourne, Kiddle made a virtually imperceptible shift in focus. During 1949, while awaiting the release of her second work of fiction for children: *West of Sunset* and the publication based on her Master of Arts thesis: *Caroline Chisholm*, Kiddle turned her thoughts to new book projects. Kiddle put aside work on her draft of *Grenfell Gold*, a work of fiction set in the gold rush era for older children and began searching for a historical non-fiction project aimed at adults. The self-assigned task was to locate a topic which would yield a level of primary documentation that had eluded *Caroline Chisholm*.¹⁷ Kiddle had been unable to locate Chisholm's personal papers. As a result, Kiddle felt that "This is not the personal biography of Caroline Chisholm which I once hoped to write because, after an eight years' search, I have been unable to trace her private papers."¹⁸ A chance remark by grazier and businessman, Sir Clive McPherson, that someone should write a book about "the good old days" gave Kiddle the subject she had been looking for.¹⁹ In September 1949, she began planning for what would become *Men of Yesterday*. By January 1952, Kiddle had embarked on a twelve-month visit to the United Kingdom to locate primary records. These materials comprising largely of letters and diaries, would form the basis of the research for *Men of Yesterday*: the work that would be her academic focus for her remaining years.

¹⁶ Manning Clark and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, in Susan L Davies ed., *Dear Kathleen, Dear Manning: The Correspondence of Manning Clark and Kathleen Fitzpatrick 1949-1990* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 182.

¹⁷ Crawford, R., 'Margaret Loch Kiddle' in *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria, 1834 - 1890*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 1983, p. x.

¹⁸ Kiddle, M., 'Acknowledgments' in *Caroline Chisholm*, Abridged, 1969, p. xii.

¹⁹ Kiddle, M. 'Seminar. - Western District: reasons for choice of subject, 21 September 1949. Seminar. Accession No. 1996.0039, p. 1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1951-1994 Collection.

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Kiddle's closest relationship within the Melbourne School of History was undoubtedly with Max Crawford. What started as a working relationship eventually developed into a close and enduring personal bond. Their informal communications are replete with book recommendations, university gossip and incidental moments from their daily lives. Woven into their lively written exchanges are many poignant narratives demonstrating the extent of their friendship; when Kiddle began writing the first chapters of her manuscript in Canberra at the commencement of her ANU Fellowship, she wrote to make a request of Crawford:

Max – it's very early to suggest this, but if I do finish it, will you let me give you the dedication? That is, if you would like to have it. You've helped me through all the ups and downs since I first decided on the subject & you deserve the dedication more than anyone else does. But apart from that I would like you to have it. Perhaps it may be the best thing I ever have to give anyone – I don't know – but if you'd like it, the book is yours.²⁰

From the time years before when Kiddle had taken her first tentative steps towards writing the earliest draft chapters of her manuscript, she was determined the eventual book would be dedicated to Max Crawford, even though she felt it had a long way to go. There had been no need for Kiddle's doubt. Crawford sent his approval days later:

Margaret, I am more moved than I can tell you at your offering the book to me. It is going to be the *magnum opus*...I think like you that 'perhaps it may be the best thing you ever have to give anyone.' And that you would be ready to give that best thing to me is something that I value in the same way as I do the love and support you have given me for so long, never obtruded and never withheld.²¹

Crawford believed from the beginning that *Men of Yesterday* would be a history of significance: "I read the plan with fascinated interest. Comments will follow later. Enough for the moment that it seems to me far more than competent. It will be

²⁰ Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 28 April 1954, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.2 University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne. Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection.

²¹ *Personal Correspondence to R. M. Crawford, Kiddle to Crawford, 3 May 1954*, Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 17 Series 7/ 27, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection*.

a book of character. It will tell us something we want to know about.”²² Kiddle relocated to Canberra in 1954 for a research fellowship at the ANU. Her letters to Crawford chart her dogged determination to complete the huge task:

I have decided that your book [*Men of Yesterday*] is: an amorphous mass: all wrong not worth writing anyway. Why that should goad me into a renewed frenzy of tinkering with the thing is just another proof of my natural contrariness. I'd like to say that I'm determined to finish it because I'm writing it for you, but that would only be partly true. I know I'll keep hammering away at the thing because I hate leaving anything unfinished. And now it's well begun I can't turn back. And in spite of all the mess of it there are just a few good moments.²³

Their relationship was one of mutual support. At times of loss and sorrow, Crawford turned to Kiddle:

Dear Margaret: I was going to write this week to thank you for the book; but I am doing so now to tell you that my wife died this evening. Quickly in the end. Please – and I mean this – do not come back from ‘Sarona’; there is nothing you can do. But I wanted you to know. John will be telling our colleagues, but he may not have your address. I am tired now and will not write more. Max²⁴

Although Margaret Kiddle had lived most of her life with the knowledge that polycystic kidney disease would mean a shortened life span, by February 1957 doctors had confirmed her life was ending. The time between blood transfusions had grown shorter and her hospital stays had become longer and more regular. Doctors could not give Kiddle any clear indication of how much time she had remaining. From her hospital bed at the Epworth, Kiddle wrote to Crawford. The letter outlined Kiddle's master plan for the time she had left. The tone of her writing was as

²² *Personal Correspondence to R. M. Crawford, Kiddle to Crawford, 5 April 1954*, Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 17 Series 7/ 27, p.3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection*.

²³ *Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 17 March 1954*, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 6, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

²⁴ *Personal Correspondence to R. M. Crawford, Kiddle to Crawford, 16 November 1956*. Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 17 Series 7/ 27, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne *Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection*.

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humorous and pragmatic as any of her earlier letters. It also offers a glimpse into the character and determination of this historian:

I am seething with plans. I gave Dr Hurley a broadside this morning & I think he's going to co-operate. As far as he can because after all he doesn't know exactly what is going to happen himself...The thing I am concerned about now is THE BOOK. I brought in a copy of the plan, handed it to him and told him to read it! I told him I'd written 12 chapters and had 6 to do – did he think I'd make it? Obviously he's not sure.²⁵

And so it was with Crawford that Kiddle outlined her plans for her remaining life. In Kiddle's own words, her story was not one of tragedy; she had written that "I've been battling with this bloody kidney most of my life & I'm not going to give it a walk over now."²⁶ News of her approaching death had not made Kiddle any less determined to see that her book was completed. She was not particularly precious about authorship either:

I'm not able to think clearly yet but I think what I should do is try to finish it myself [she wrote to Crawford] but at the same time have an understudy who could take over from me if necessary. Do you think Marnie Bassett would be interested? ...her style might match mine fairly well....She might have other commitments of course. Or can you think of a better plan of campaign? (all hands to the files)²⁷

Although there is an absence of correspondence with other females within Kiddle's personal papers, her suggestion of Bassett as a possible author to complete *Men of Yesterday* revealed Kiddle's respect for Bassett's ability. Twenty-five years Kiddle's senior, Bassett was a self-taught scholar who had never studied at university. This was a demonstration that for Kiddle the completion of *Men of Yesterday* was a contribution to historical scholarship, rather than being solely a personal achievement. The suggestion Crawford manipulated Kiddle emotionally, prior to the death of his first wife, is arguably overstated. Biographers of Crawford

²⁵ Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 16 February 1957, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 1–2, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne. *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

and Fitzpatrick reach similar conclusions based on Kiddle's response to news of death of Crawford's first wife:

After I arrive I will telephone to ask how you are. Unless you want me to do so I won't seek you out (except to drop in occasionally at the University) but if you do just want to talk & relax we could meet. Unless you make them there will be no emotional demands made & if you do want to make the demands there will be no strings attached – I've put that badly – I don't know how to put it. I think you know me well enough to understand what I'm trying to say. I just want you to feel that while you're trying to readjust yourself if I can help you in any way at all it would give me great happiness to do so.²⁸

Despite this paragraph being a small excerpt from a long letter discussing grief, Fitzpatrick's biographer Elizabeth Kleinhenz compares Kiddle's words to some of Fitzpatrick's more "craven attempts at subservience." This, Kleinhenz asserts, forced Crawford to immediately take evasive action to ensure Kiddle did not misinterpret his intentions.²⁹ Crawford replied:

I hope I won't draw on your understanding too heavily as it really would be unfair.

Extreme tiredness and a background of worry made me do so once before, though I can't altogether regret it and it has worried me. Dear Margaret, I am very, very fond of you, but I have realised, as I believe you did as once, that it was not the sort of fondness to justify emotional demands, and I am terribly anxious not to cause you unhappiness, not to alloy friendship with bitterness. Your wise & brave letter has made it clear that you won't let that happen; but I am so tired after these months & still so wound up with all the strain & the wringing out that I could act clean against my judgement & my will.³⁰

Whilst the meaning of Kiddle's letter is ambiguous, it has likely been misconstrued by Kleinhenz. Kiddle appears to have been reaching out purely as a

²⁸ Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 22 November 1956. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne. *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

²⁹ Elizabeth Kleinhenz, *A Brimming Cup: The life of Kathleen Fitzpatrick* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013), 189.

³⁰ *Personal Correspondence to R. M. Crawford, Crawford to Kiddle, 27 November 1956*, Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 18, Series 7/ 27, p.6-7, *Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection*, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne.

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friend with whom she shared a deep personal attachment. The misunderstanding may possibly have been only Crawford's. Within a little over a year, Crawford had remarried.³¹ The suggestion that Kiddle harboured an ambition to marry Crawford seems incompatible with her personal life. Kiddle had previously eschewed thoughts of traditional marriage. The death of Crawford's wife also coincided closely with Kiddle becoming aware that her own condition was terminal.³² Theirs was a friendship of mutual emotional and academic support. As Kiddle neared the end of her life, Crawford proved to be an enduring friend.

With due respect for Manning

Manning Clark was someone Kiddle had "great personal affection for."³³ They had been acquainted since their years as students at the University of Melbourne, where they were undergraduates at the same time. By 1945 Clark was a lecturer in the university's history department, and quickly gained a reputation for his entertaining and dramatic lectures.³⁴ Crawford, anxious to preserve the reputation of the history department he was building, lobbied for Clark to be offered an early promotion in 1949 in the form of a Senior Lectureship.³⁵ Instead, Clark applied for and was appointed as Chair of History at Canberra University College.³⁶ From 1930 the college was the academic responsibility of the University of Melbourne until its eventual merger with the Australian National University in 1960.³⁷

Responding to criticisms by the Australasian Publishing Company in critique of the manuscript for her children's book *West of Sunset* in 1947, Kiddle asked Clark to read the work and "jump on any historical inaccuracies".³⁸ Although their friendship endured, the waning of Kiddle's esteem for Clark's academic approach to

³¹ Anderson, 321.

³² Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 11 February 1957. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

³³ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 27 June 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 7, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

³⁴ Mark McKenna, "Clark, Charles Manning (1915-1991)," *Australian Dictionary of Bibliography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clark-charles-manning-225>.

³⁵ Anderson, 199.

³⁶ Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2011), 273.

³⁷ John Poynter and Carolyn Rasmussen, *A Place Apart : The University of Melbourne : Decades of Challenge* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 187.

³⁸ Kiddle (Draft) to Bartlett, 18 October 1947. Letter. Series 950/1a/2a, Ms 8637, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. *Margaret Loch Kiddle, Papers Ca. 1937 to Ca. 1965*.

history was apparent from the commencement of her time in Canberra. Having arrived in Canberra a few years ahead of her, Clark had attempted to warn Kiddle about the personalities of the ANU academics she would soon consider emasculated: “I reserved judgement, because Manning does get such odd ideas, but it is true.”³⁹ Kiddle’s harsh words were based upon her own observations of unnamed ANU academics she felt were trying to intimidate Ward into “conforming to the academic jargon.” Kiddle vowed to try and make Ward stop listening to “the clever fools” and write his thesis his own way.⁴⁰

From their Robin Boyd house at Tasmania Circle, the Clark family quickly became “renowned for its hospitality, quality of conversation and irrepressible *joie de vivre*.”⁴¹ They were the stuff of newspaper lifestyle features, with titles such as “An ivory tower for a Professor (absent-minded or not), a home for a family.” Kiddle’s correspondence tells a different story. In one of her regular letters to Geoffrey Serle, Kiddle described the domestic chaos of the Clark household:

Did you know that Dymphna Clark had been in hospital for a month with rheumatic fever? Poor Manning has been trying to cope with the house & children but Dymphna always was the better man of those two & he’s making heavy weather of it. Dymphna will be in hospital at least another 6 weeks. I am going to try and be with them on Sundays to ‘do’ for them. The worst trouble at the moment is all their clothes have disappeared – can’t understand what’s become of them. Not a sock to be found! I shall sally forth armed with a large packet of Lux and the apron I KNEW I’d need!...I can talk to Manning about the book!⁴²

Determined as always, Kiddle continued to pursue Clark for his view for her plan for the book. She was pleased to find Clark excited about the book, predicting that it would be “a work of art”, yet she dismissed Clark’s view that she should give more emphasis to “morality”, for which she only had a single chapter. Manning advised that Kiddle trade her subject-based chapters for a simple chronological arrangement to avoid having the morality theme lost in the more descriptive

³⁹ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 12 April 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁴⁰ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 12 April 1954.

⁴¹ McKenna, 312.

⁴² Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 24 March 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.6, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

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chapters. "With due respect for Manning, I don't think it would. There's enough artistry in the simple truth of the story without in any way exaggerating it."⁴³ Kiddle's vision for *Men of Yesterday* had given her the confidence to reject the advice of a rising star of her profession.

Kiddle's perceptions of Clark irrevocably changed after attending his famous inaugural lecture as Professor of History at Canberra University College in June 1954.⁴⁴ In her lengthy summary to Serle, Kiddle was direct in her criticism: "It's years since I've heard Manning lecture (& then only once) his style was bad then: it's abominable now."⁴⁵ The reason for Kiddle's annoyance centred on themes that had emerged from Clark's lecture:

It does seem to me that all the suggestions he made as to the re-writing of Australian History are ideas which have been circulating amongst us for years. That would not have mattered so much, but at least to me he appeared to be arguing as if he & he alone had thought of them. I dunno – perhaps I'm being unjust in trying to worry it out afterwards. I thought perhaps all our ideas had originally come from Manning! But I've never heard or read his lectures & I've got 'em.⁴⁶

Kiddle was incredulous that her Canberra colleagues did not see the flaws in Clark's argument. She complained to Serle: "Out of it all it seems to me that Manning, as the Emperor, is still comparatively well-dressed, but is by no means clothed in the gorgeous raiment which some people seem to see glittering around him."⁴⁷ Consoling herself over having such contrary feelings towards her long-time friend, Kiddle added: "I'm still in awe of his very great knowledge, I admire the imagination & insight which is still there. But - & it's a dreadful thing to say - after seeing him in action this year. I just don't trust his judgement." With that statement, Kiddle had made a resolution in relation to Clark: "I don't think I'll ask much advice from him about my book."⁴⁸

⁴³ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 15 May 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.2–3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁴⁴ Manning Clark, "Rewriting Australian History," in *Occasional Writings and Speeches* (Sydney: Fontana/Collins 1980).

⁴⁵ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 27 June 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

In the last year of her life, Clark remained supportive of Kiddle's efforts to complete the manuscript, reading completed chapters and sending his notes and edits back in return. A few weeks before her death, he wrote:

I have just finished reading your work, and enclose some random comments. You will publish it as it is because it is your creation, and a very good creation it is too. Of course people will quarrel with you. They always do.⁴⁹

In Clark, Kiddle observed a man warped by excessive religiosity: "And I suspect that springs chiefly from his fear of death. From hints he & Dymphna have let fall I believe he's one of those unhappy people with the uncontrollable fear. It must be dreadful."⁵⁰ Her observations may have had merit. Twenty years later, Clark described Kiddle's eye for eccentrics and the bizarre. "I imagine it was those early limitations of mortality, that knowledge of being a stricken creature, which tinted the lenses of her camera with that something extra."⁵¹ Clark described Kiddle's discovery of Western District squatter, Niel Black with envy. Making Black central to *Men of Yesterday* had achieved something he had wanted for his own writing:

Over the tops of the clothes on the line she said to me: 'Niel Black's one of your men, Manning.' So he was, because he was a troubled and tormented man. Her gift of the [Black] letters still lives in my room at Canberra as a reminder of how I failed where she succeeded: I mean she created Niel Black, she made him immortal, and my Niel Black still remained inside me...⁵²

Brickbats will be gratefully received

Geoffrey Serle and Margaret Kiddle were colleagues who developed a close friendship based on a shared interest in building an archive of primary nineteenth century documents relating to the history of Victoria. By the time Serle joined the teaching staff of the University of Melbourne History Department in 1950, Kiddle was already in her first year of preparing research for what would eventually become *Men*

⁴⁹ Clark, C.M., to Kiddle, M. L., 6 April 1958. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁵⁰ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 27 June 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁵¹ Clark, 23.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

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of Yesterday.⁵³ Through their letters they discussed their efforts to locate and protect archival material, and talk often revolved around Kiddle's coordinated campaigns to gather more resources for their shared use:

We decided that I should work out something like the enclosed note which we could then discuss the Executive Council of the Grazier's Association then perhaps you or I might talk to them & we could work out some plan of campaign to locate Victorian material. We thought of a general questionnaire but since then I've been talking to Noel Butlin & he suggested that the wool company inspectors...who are continually travelling around the country might be the best people to locate the stuff.⁵⁴

Kiddle's enthusiasm for western district history provided Serle with inspiration for his study of nineteenth-century Victoria. Serle would use her example as a "guiding light" throughout his career, particularly for the choice of a great Australian subject, "her search for the ways to tell a story and evoke a landscape, and her passionate concern for the survival and preservation of the documentary record..."⁵⁵ The discovery of additional archival materials were widely shared and discussed between Kiddle and her colleagues; Their letters often included copies or transcripts of records. Her efforts, through the collection of records, to push to push the frontiers of knowledge was palpable. During discussion with Serle over sharing archival finds with members of the Faculty of Science, Kiddle decided: "I don't know if you'll approve of me going to "the scientists" about the matter. But whether you approve or not station records are of much more than historical interest & I think we'll have to treat them accordingly."⁵⁶ To her trusted confidante Serle, Kiddle demonstrated her magnanimous nature in sharing records with researchers she did not particularly care for, such as the economic historian, Noel Butlin: "He seems properly grateful & so he bloody well should be. He's a surly, loutish brute, but I'm determined to get on well with him – though I won't stand for any "cornering" of records." After some negotiation, Kiddle had arranged for Butlin to gain access to the Dalgety pastoral

⁵³ John Thompson, *The Patrician and the Bloke : Geoffrey Serle and the Making of Australian History* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006), 199.

⁵⁴ *Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 24 March 1954*. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 2, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁵⁵ Thompson, 208.

⁵⁶ *Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 24 March 1954*. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

company records, an archive the company had previously been told him did not exist. Butlin had been “livid” to discover the Dalgety records had already been accessed by others.⁵⁷

The friendship between Kiddle and Serle was mutually supportive. Kiddle had encouraged him as a young lecturer who lacked confidence in his ability.⁵⁸ Serle in return, was a valued contributor throughout Kiddle’s researching, planning and writing of *Men of Yesterday*. Exchanges such as “All suggestions of any kind concerning the whole plan will be welcomed, & brickbats will be gratefully received” demonstrated the esteem in which Kiddle regarded her younger friend.⁵⁹ The experience proved useful for Serle, as he followed closely behind with work towards what would eventually become his first classic of Australian historiography; *The Golden Age: a history of the colony of Victoria 1851-1861*.⁶⁰ By the December following Kiddle’s death, Serle had written 50,000 words of the manuscript.⁶¹ *The Golden Age* was published by MUP in 1963, two years after *Men of Yesterday*. In discussions over how their work was progressing, Kiddle spoke to Serle of the “long agony” of writing:

As I see it, it IS a great story, but it’s the execution of the plan that’ll make the book and whether I can carry that through as it should be carried I won’t know till it’s finished...I tear in to it every morning and can see the sweep of the story – or rather hear the sweep of it. I try to get it on paper of course. I never can – you know how it is.⁶²

Their close friendship naturally spilled over to matters of a more personal nature. Kiddle admitted she suspected something had been going on when Serle announced he had fallen for Jessie Macdonald, the woman he would marry the following year: “Of course you would slip in the bit about “trying to decide whether I’m in love or not” just amongst the rest...it’s such an individual thing & you’re such a

⁵⁷ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 31 March 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁵⁸ Thompson, 226.

⁵⁹ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 31 March 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age : A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963).

⁶¹ Thompson, 225.

⁶² Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 12 April 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p.2, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

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cautious bloke.” Kiddle promised her friend she was a qualified and sympathetic listener should he need someone to talk with.⁶³ Serle was someone to whom Kiddle revealed a rare crack in her independence by asking him to assist her in dealing with an exuberant Russel Ward. During her time at the ANU, Kiddle was given responsibility for supervising Ward for one year of his PhD. His formal supervisor was Fitzhardinge:

Geoff – I’m really writing to ask you would you do something for me. At an opportune moment while Russel is with you, please would you explain to him that I’m sometimes much more tired than the average person ever is, & that occasionally I’m in a bit of pain? Possibly I’ll be able to bluff it out with him the whole year – I’ve become adept at bluff. But I have to see so much of him that I think he’ll have to know sooner or later & it could be easier for us both if someone like you explained.⁶⁴

Although it was rare, Kiddle was willing, where necessary, to reveal a more vulnerable side of her personality to her male colleagues.

That big, beautiful man, that great galoot

Ward’s doctorate, *The Ethos and Influence of the Australian Pastoral Worker* was published in 1958 as *The Australian Legend*, the classic study of the Australian character.⁶⁵ Kiddle described to Serle, the heart-to-heart talks she had with “that big, beautiful man, that great galoot” who she believed was “scared of all these emasculated academics & is trying to force himself to conform to the academic jargon... I’ll have to try to make him stop listening to the clever fools and write the thesis in his own way.”⁶⁶ Kiddle was fearless in her approach to her male colleagues, occasionally passing judgements as to the potency of their masculinity. Ward did not escape her keen eye: “Russel is quite large & definitely an asset...He’s the kind of man, to who hands a woman in & out of a car & opens & shuts doors – very

⁶³ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 8 August 1954, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 4, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection.

⁶⁴ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 15 May 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 2, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection.

⁶⁵ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958).

⁶⁶ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 12 April 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 3, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection.

satisfying!”⁶⁷ Ward was enjoyable for Kiddle to supervise and equally passionate about his subject matter. Kiddle described a ninety-minute “awful ear bashing” she received on prostitution and homosexuality:

The point being that there are no references to either in the ballads. He seems to think his ‘nomad tribe’ were pure & undefiled – that I can’t believe. But he became so impassioned on the subject I began to get a bit pink & was glad the room was in twilight...I gave him too, some lurid extracts from the Black Papers which silenced him. I reckon there’s a heavy censorship on those ballads. But he’s got some wonderful stuff & we’re a great help to each other.⁶⁸

Ward acknowledged Kiddle’s contribution, explaining how she, along with Clark, had taught him to “swim in the academic sea.” Fitzhardinge had the wisdom “or perhaps the humility to encourage the widest possible consultation with others, of whom Margaret was the first and the greatest.”⁶⁹ In May of 1955, Ward noted to Kiddle how he had been “bogged” down in the Gold Rush era of his thesis for some time, and could “feel the chill blasts of the new year down the back of my neck.” Commenting about his PhD supervision after Kiddle’s return to Melbourne, Ward wrote:

LF [Fitzhardinge] has observed your injunctions by leaving me entirely undisturbed. In fact I have had great difficulty in getting him to read through up to Ch [chapter] 5, feeling that it was safer to have objections now than later. I realised only afterwards that he’d been unconsciously complementary by commenting that it was coming along very nicely or some such.⁷⁰

Like Crawford, Clark and Serle, Ward actively took part in critiquing Kiddle’s chapter plans and drafts over the years as she worked on the manuscript for what would become *Men of Yesterday*. In the midst of Ward’s struggles to obtain

⁶⁷ Kiddle, M., to Serle, G., 24 March 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 5, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁶⁸ Kiddle, M., to Crawford, R.M., 28 April 1954. Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 4, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁶⁹ Ward, *A Radical Life: The Autobiography of Russel Ward*, 229.

⁷⁰ Ward, R. to Kiddle, M.L., May 18, 1955. Letter. MS 7578, Series 1, Box 12. Folder 102, p. 2, National Library of Australia, *Russel Ward Papers*.

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academic work once his thesis was completed, he continued to critique draft chapters of Kiddle's manuscript:

I couldn't help feeling that the chapter as a whole is not quite as successful (despite a beautiful opening) as the earlier ones. A graceless thing to say immediately following the extremely cheering remarks you've made so recently about my stuff, and I wouldn't take much notice of it. It may be simply that this chapter must inevitably, by its nature be so more complex, scrambled and so on than the earlier ones where you're describing aspects of the so much simpler pastoral (almost Arcadian) pre-gold society. Or it may be a purely subjective reaction stemming from matters in me and not in your work.⁷¹

Ward's search for an academic position was arduous, complicated by his past Communist Party membership. He shared his delight over the completion of thesis writing, "am working on the bibliography...it's a wonderful feeling" in between words that documented his difficulties in procuring work.⁷² "It is kind of you to concern yourself so much about a job for me. Changes in the shape of things to come here (since I last saw you) move me to cast false pride & bogus shreds of dignity to the winds."⁷³

Ward was an ardent admirer of Kiddle. He confided in her and sought her advice frequently. Towards the end of her life, Ward often opened his letters with "Darling Margaret."⁷⁴ His critiques of her draft chapters were detailed and appreciated by Kiddle. In a show of gratitude for her support and friendship, Ward contacted La Nauze after Kiddle's death and pledged his willingness to assist with seeing the book to publication: "You know without my labouring the matter how anxious I'll be to give any help, at any stage which you think desirable."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ward, R. to Kiddle, M.L., 29 February, 1956, Letter. MS 7578, Series 1, Box 12. Folder 102, p. 1, National Library of Australia, *Russel Ward Papers*.

⁷² Ward, R. to Kiddle, M.L., 4 November, 1955. Letter. MS 7578, Series 1, Box 12. Folder 102, p. 1, National Library of Australia, *Russel Ward Papers*.

⁷³ Ward, R. to Kiddle, M.L., 3 August, 1955, Letter. MS 7578, Series 1, Box 12. Folder 102, p. 1, National Library of Australia, *Russel Ward Papers*.

⁷⁴ Ward, R., to Kiddle, M.L., 29 September 1957, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁷⁵ Ward, R., to La Nauze, J., 20 November 1958, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, p. 1, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

This book has been finished in dramatic circumstances

Seven months before her death, Kiddle added a codicil to her Will. The modification bequeathed her literary estate to the University of Melbourne. This meant all future royalties on sales of books written by Kiddle, whether published or unpublished at the time of her death, would be paid to the university. Specifically, Kiddle's wishes were that the Professor of History, Max Crawford and the Ernest Scott Professor of History, John La Nauze use the royalties "in their absolute discretion for any purpose associated with the work of the Department of History..."⁷⁶ In making this gesture, Kiddle confirmed her desire for her name to remain associated with the department. It was also a measure of the trust and esteem in which Kiddle held her colleagues: that she would entrust them to see her *magnum opus* finally reach publication.

As literary executors, Crawford and La Nauze were left with Kiddle's detailed instructions for the acknowledgements and retail price of the book which was released three years later. Kiddle humorously suggested that her own death be used to promote the book. Highlighting her own pragmatism, there were no outward traces that she viewed herself as a tragic figure: "This book has been finished in dramatic circumstances – for publicity purposes cash in on them as much as you like – it may earn you some money."⁷⁷ Within the year following its 1961 release, *Men of Yesterday* had raised £1047 for the History Department. Crawford opened a trust account while plans were made to channel the funds into an essay prize and staff room among other uses.⁷⁸

More than thirty years after publication, Kiddle's sister Elizabeth contacted The Press to raise the question of reprinting *Men of Yesterday*. Though the book was described as "one of the foundation works of Australian historical scholarship," it was deemed too costly for 'the Press' to keep in print. The exchange was revealing for another reason: a senior MUP staff admitted to having no knowledge of the extensive University of Melbourne archive: the location of the Kiddle's unpublished

⁷⁶ 534/205 Will and Codicil of Margaret Loch Kiddle, Will. Va 2549 Supreme Court of Victoria, Vprs 28/P0004, Probate, Unit 001703, Public Record Office of Victoria.

⁷⁷ Kiddle, M., 'to My Literary Executors', 4 April 1958. Letter. Series 951/2a/3, State Library of Victoria, Margaret Loch Kiddle, Papers Ca. 1937 to Ca. 1965.

⁷⁸ Personal Correspondence with J. A. La Nauze, Crawford to La Nauze, 17 May 1962, Letter. Accession No. 1991.0113, Box 20, Series 7/ 57, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Raymond Maxwell Crawford (Professor) Collection.

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manuscripts.⁷⁹ Those who held ownership of Kiddle's literary estate no longer possessed detailed knowledge of its contents.

The legacy of *Men of Yesterday* shaped how the academic community remembered Kiddle and remains the best known work of her short career. Yet the reputation of this ground-breaking work of social history did not enough to rescue it from a publishing industry driven by economics. *Men of Yesterday* was last published in a corrected edition in 1983.⁸⁰ Plans to reprint it by the MUP were abandoned in the 1990s due to the "prohibitive" cost of such a proposal.⁸¹ Other landmark works of Australian history by members of the Melbourne School of history and published by MUP remain in print. Clark's six volume *A History of Australia* has been reformatted into three volumes and is available in both hardback and paperback as well as E-book, while Serle's *The Golden Age* is also in print through paperback and e-book formats. Kiddle's *Caroline Chisholm* has fared better. A new edition appeared in 1990 and it remains in print.⁸²

In accordance with Kiddle's wishes, her papers were deposited with the University of Melbourne. In 1962, Crawford began the task of sorting through the first instalment of Kiddle's large archive of manuscripts, research materials and drafts.⁸³ Ultimately, the papers were split between the University of Melbourne Archives and the State Library of Victoria, with neither repository holding a complete set of records for any of Kiddle's published works. The demarcation between university archive and public library seems apt for a historian who made significant contributions to the preservation, research and writing of Australian history.

Margaret Loch Kiddle was an academic who worked within the Melbourne School of History from 1946 to 1958. She was a rare female member among the historians of the era. Kiddle produced two ground-breaking histories in *Caroline Chisholm* and *Men of Yesterday*, but her life and career were shortened by illness. Her participation in the intellectual and personal networks of the Australian historical

⁷⁹ Putnam to Bush, E., 12 November 1997, Letter. Collection, Accession No. 2008.0047, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998*.

⁸⁰ Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria 1834-1890* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983).

⁸¹ Putnam to Bush, E., 12 November 1997, Letter. Accession No. 2008.0047, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, *Kiddle, Margaret Loch (1914-1958) 1952-1998 Collection*.

⁸² Margaret Kiddle, *Caroline Chisholm* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1950, 1957 (2nd ed.), 1969 (abridged ed.), 1990 (abridged ed. with new introduction), 1996 (reprint).

⁸³ *Memorandum: Margaret Kiddle's Papers, 25 June 1962*, Memorandum. Series 947/3b/2c 5, Ms 8637, *Margaret Loch Kiddle, Papers Ca. 1937 to Ca. 1965*, State Library of Victoria.

profession during the creative era that launched the careers of public intellectuals such as Manning Clark, Geoffrey Serle and Russel Ward has not been fully acknowledged.

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