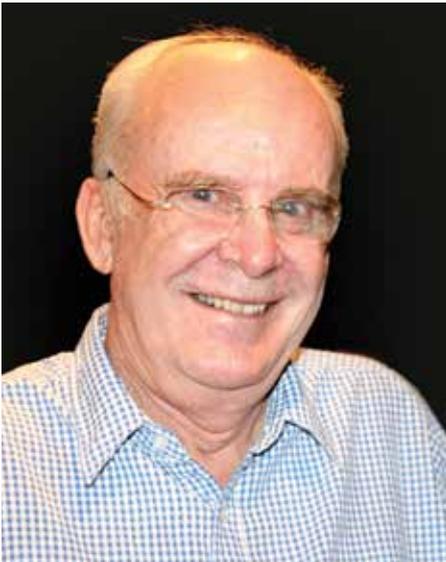


# KEVIN FAHY (1932–2007)

## Friend, patriarch, storyteller, scholar



The idea of an annual series of lectures named after Kevin Fahy came from our secretary, Michael Lech. The obvious subject for the first, held in Sydney on 12 March, was Kevin himself. *Australiana* editor and foundation member John Wade chose to talk about him as a friend, patriarch, storyteller and scholar, to round out his story for those who knew him only from his publications.

### JOHN WADE

Kevin Fahy is a revered authority on Australian decorative arts and domestic interiors, a prodigious researcher and author on the subject without equal (**plate 1**). He was, however, much more than that. He opened my eyes to many things, and when I think of him now, it brings a tear.

This is not an authoritative biography. I have flipped through Kevin's publications, drawn on my imperfect memory, and sought reminiscences from his family and friends. Fortunately, Jim Bertouch had the forethought to interview Kevin in depth in 2004; we published an edited version of that oral history in *Australiana*.<sup>1</sup>

Kevin was self-deprecating and neither bragged nor volunteered information about himself unless something triggered it. I discovered that his first home was the Victoria Hotel in Annandale because we drove past it one day and he casually mentioned it. Nevertheless, I hope to explain what shaped Kevin's interests and how Kevin came to be such a force in the study of *Australiana*.

### Friend

It seems incredible that Kevin Fahy died nine years ago, on 2 February 2007. For some months, he had not been his ebullient self, but it never occurred to me that he would die so suddenly, nor

that I would be asked to write about him.<sup>2</sup> He was my mentor, colleague and good friend for 30 years.

His qualities were obvious: cheerful, charming, optimistic, curious, enthusiastic, generous, kind, helpful, modest, amusing and well-informed. And though he always walked with a cane, he never, ever, complained about his disability.

Kevin excelled at telling amusing stories – often. He always asked if you'd heard a story before, but I never admitted it because there was always some new embellishment. His nephew Mark Jones – who regarded Kevin as a father figure – alleged that Kevin recited his Patrick White story 46 times.

The story goes like this. The imperious Dame Helen Blaxland (1907–89) was dining with novelist Patrick White, when she observed in her cavalry lisp, "Patwick, your books are so hard to wead." White replied, "Yes, Helen, and they are so hard to wite."

Kevin had a phenomenal knowledge and a capacity to link one story with others. Jenny and I once drove Kevin to visit collectors Carl Gonsalves and Caressa Crouch for lunch. Jenny had just organised the naming of a small park after a dancer. That set Kevin off; all the way from Hunter's Hill to Palm Beach, each suburb would remind him that some pillar of society had kept a

1. Kevin Fahy, 2004. Photo John Wade

2. Kevin's father, Francis Fahy, 1920s



mistress there. He always had the ability to see the history that's all around us.

Only once did I trump Kevin's knowledge. James Broadbent had approached Kevin about his 2003 exhibition *India, China, Australia*. They were discussing the Chinese artefacts at Captain John Piper's splendid *Henrietta Villa* at Point Piper, and Kevin dredged up from his phenomenal memory that at the clearing sale in 1827, two Chinese figures stood in the dome room.

"What a pity", I casually added, "that one had lost its head." I couldn't withstand their withering looks, and had

to admit that I'd read it by chance in *The Australian* – that's *The Australian* of 6 June 1827 – just the day before.<sup>3</sup>

### Frank Fahy and the Wentworth Hotel

Kevin's father, Francis Joseph Fahy<sup>4</sup> was born in Sydney in 1895, the son of James (1856–1928)<sup>5</sup> from County Clare and Kate from Tipperary (c 1851–1938).<sup>6</sup> Frank (plate 2) started work as a porter at the prestigious Wentworth Hotel in Lang Street, Sydney about 1910.

At a time when many people looked



#### 3.

The Wentworth Hotel, Church Hill, Sydney, as rebuilt 1889–90. Illustrated advertisements appear in the Sydney newspapers from November 1890

#### 4.

The New Wentworth Café and Ballroom, 1920. *Sydney Mail* 31 Mar 1920 p 28

#### 5.

Kevin's mother, Mary Ellen ("Nellie") Fahy, 1920s

#### 6.

Professor John Smith, *Drummoyne House*, c 1855, photograph. Collection: Mitchell Library





## 7.

*The Grange*, Bathurst. Kevin's mother took her children to stay here with her sister in 1942. In those days the verandahs may not have been bricked up.  
Photo John Wade 2016

## 8.

Kevin in his *Riverview* school uniform with sisters Judy and Helen

## 9.

The south-western part of the Quadrangle, University of Sydney, housing the Archaeology department, Nicholson Museum and the then Fisher Library, now Maclaurin Hall



to England for history, professed that Australia had none and avoided any mention of a convict ancestor, Kevin thrived on Australia's past, and discovered, for example in his father's workplace, a vivid history.

In 1854, Miss Onges opened a boarding house here in the two-storey dwelling built in 1827, which had once housed the office of *The Australian* newspaper, and which she called Wentworth House. Miss Onges advised that

FAMILIES from the Hunter contemplating a visit to Sydney, will find every comfort in the way of BOARD and APARTMENTS, on moderate terms, at Miss Onges, Church Hill, opposite St. Philip's, Wentworth House, No. 3.<sup>7</sup>

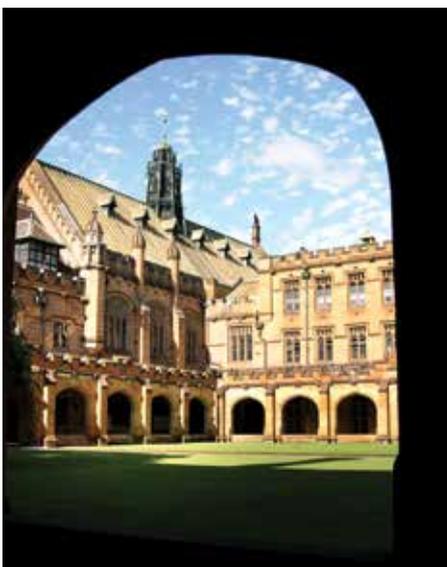
Mary Hayes purchased the boarding house in 1881,<sup>8</sup> redecorated and renamed it the Wentworth House Family Hotel.<sup>9</sup> When the hotel burned down on Christmas Day 1888, two young Irish boarders died. Mrs Hayes re-built it with an elaborate High Victorian facade designed by architects Tappin, Dennehy & Smart at a cost of £12,000. Her new four-storey Wentworth Hotel opened in 1890 (plate 3).

Donald<sup>10</sup> and Hannah Maclurcan, who had run various hotels in

Queensland, took over the hotel in 1901.<sup>11</sup> Mrs Maclurcan was renowned for her cookery book, *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book*, first published in Townsville in 1898 where she and her husband ran the Queen's Hotel.<sup>12</sup> Mrs Maclurcan was a prolific self-publicist. Later editions reprint a polite thank-you letter from the wife of the Governor of Queensland, Lady Lamington, to whom she had sent a copy.

Mrs Maclurcan expanded and improved her hotel. She opened the new Wentworth Café and Ballroom in 1920 (plate 4).<sup>13</sup> The NSW Government booked her entire hotel to accommodate the party of Edward Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, who danced in the new ballroom. Frank Fahy would have seen and possibly "met" the playboy Prince, but life at the Wentworth wasn't all gaiety and glamour. In December 1920, a man stormed in demanding to know the owner of a car parked outside; when Frank Fahy refused to tell him, he behaved "like a madman" and punched Frank to the ground.<sup>14</sup>

Frank grasped the opportunities his position offered. Seeing hotel guests using hire cars, he bought two for himself. Mrs Maclurcan installed another phone line so he could offer an extra service as an SP bookie. Frank's daughter Judy says that by the time he was 23 he owned his first hotel. He also bought several houses in Balmain.<sup>15</sup>



## Family

Frank married Mary Ellen (Nellie) Hannan (1901–84) (**plate 5**) at the family church, St Augustine's Balmain, on 1 June 1925; a newspaper report clumsily wrote that “the bride ... was led to the altar by her father”, Daniel, of the Town Hall Hotel, Balmain.<sup>16</sup> The families were close and the Hannans ran the Railway Hotel at Lidcombe from the later 1920s.<sup>17</sup>

Frank took over the licence of the Victoria Hotel at Annandale in 1930.<sup>18</sup> Their first child Kevin Francis Fahy was born in Duntroon Private Hospital on nearby Johnston Street on 21 December 1932.<sup>19</sup> He was joined by three sisters – Judy (Moran, born 1935 at Duntroon)<sup>20</sup> Helen (Jones, born 1937 at Leichhardt)<sup>21</sup> and Rosilea (Gabriel, born 1943 at KGV.Camperdown).

Kevin and his family had immensely strong and loving bonds. A leader to his three younger sisters, “Kevie” became in turn the patriarch to their nine children. Julieanne Moran, now Watson, – the eldest and the only girl, who most shared his interest in Australiana and who slept in a cedar four poster since she was three – might have seemed to be Uncle Kev’s favourite, but he was equally devoted to all his eight nephews.

They moved westwards to a house at 72 Wright’s Road, Drummoyne about 1936, a sprawling late Victorian house with lawns stretching down to the Parramatta River. By 1938 Frank was running the Birkenhead Hotel at

Drummoyne. On 24 August 1938, “St Joan of Arc Hall, Haberfield, was transformed into a Fairyland, when a Children’s Fancy Dress Ball was held,” and “thirty little debs were presented to the parish priest, Rev. Father Walsh.” Kevin Fahy partnered Pat Day, but a prize eluded him.<sup>22</sup> A year later, on 23 August, the annual ball came round again. This time, Kevin squired Bonnie Bradbury but still no prize.<sup>23</sup>

At Drummoyne, Kevin may have developed his interest in historic houses. He often reflected on *Drummoyne House*, situated at the end of Wright’s Road, and its alleged underground tunnel. Merchant William Wright had built *Drummoyne House* in the early 1850s and Professor John Smith photographed it at the time (**plate 6**). It was demolished for the ubiquitous home units in the 1970s.

For part of the war, the family lived in the Birkenhead Hotel. Judy described her father Frank as “a soft man, an angel”. Dad went to the races on Saturday and if he won, his euphoria was translated into buying the girls hats, which they never wore. Mum went to Mass on Sunday mornings and the kids were left at the hotel, until the day they went into the bar through a door left unlocked by a cleaner. When Mum got home she realised her children had been drinking something stronger than Mynor cordial. After that, Sunday arrangements were entirely different.

In 1942 the family moved from the vulnerable harbour foreshore at Drummoyne to Bathurst – possibly as a



### 10.

Eve and Jim Stewart at *Mount Pleasant*, c 1953-4. Stewart Collection, University of New England Heritage Centre, 2013.149.1.29c

### 11.

The Library, *The Mount*, Bathurst, 1953. Photo Basil Hennessy. The cold and austere room does not hint at the richness of Stewart’s personal library. Stewart Collection, University of New England Heritage Centre, 2013.149.1.21c

### 12.

*The Mount*, Bathurst, c. 1953. Photo Sid Hagley. Stewart Collection, University of New England Heritage Centre, 2013.149.1.21d





**13.**

Mount Pleasant as it is today, renamed Abercrombie House. Photo John Wade 2016

**14.**

Kevin and his mother Nellie at Judy and Vincent Moran's wedding, 1958

**15.**

John Carmichael, *Irrawang Vineyard and Pottery*, from James Macle hose, *Picture of Sydney and Strangers Guide in NSW for 1839*

**16.**

Moulded pottery mask decoration excavated at the Irrawang Pottery, near Raymond Terrace. Photo John Wade

result of the Japanese midget submarine attack in May – where they lived in the imposing Victorian two-story brick house *The Grange* (now 10 Daly Street) with Mum, her sister Julia Daly and her children (plate 7).<sup>24</sup> The tribe wandered the neighbourhood and got into mischief.

Judy says Kevin was the ring leader and “always up to something”. One day they took their six-month old baby cousin with them, and when they returned home without him, the police and priest were called. The elder children were stoic but eventually young Helen burst into tears and confessed that they had killed the baby. Fortunately they hadn't, they had just stuffed him down a hollow tree trunk.

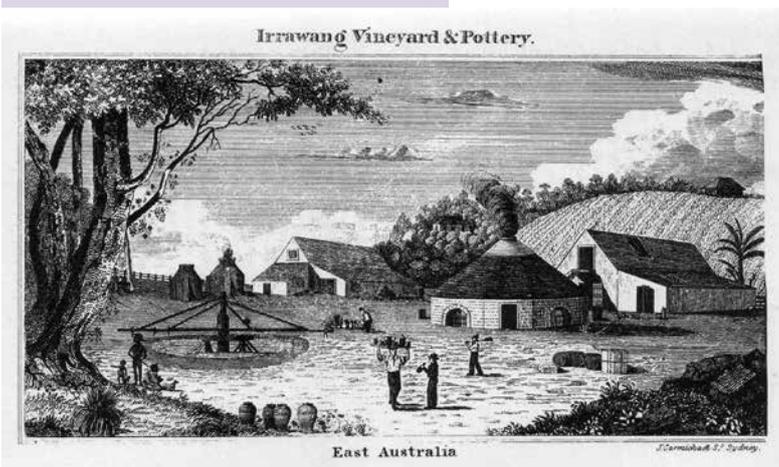
An important member of the Fahy household was Nursie, Dorothy Williams. Kevin and Judy went rapidly through minders until Nursie arrived about 1937. Kevin adored Nursie, who was kind, intelligent and, most

significantly, encouraged his reading. She stayed with Nellie and Kevin for 50 years.

As all boys did, Kevin collected stamps. He was still at primary school when he graduated to collecting from op shops and antique shops. Kevin passed his final primary exams at De La Salle College Ashfield in 1944.<sup>25</sup> He was usually joint dux with his best friend Errol Lea-Scarlett. Both went on to St Ignatius College, Riverview (plate 8), and Errol, who shared his birthday, went on to become an historian, genealogist and teacher at Riverview, from which both boys matriculated to the University of Sydney at the end of 1950.

**Life after school**

The Korean War began in 1950 and in response the Menzies government introduced National Service in 1951 for all males aged 18. Kevin completed his compulsory National Service in Army intelligence, and spent a year





working in the city, before beginning an arts degree at the University of Sydney (**plate 9**) in 1953.<sup>26</sup> Fine arts did not yet exist at the University of Sydney, so as well as studying history, geography and economics, Kevin enrolled in archaeology in 1954, in the department headed by Professor of Greek and Archaeology A D Trendall (1909–95). Dale Trendall was the world expert in his field of South Italian pottery, and a brilliant communicator who spoke and wrote clearly, entirely free of jargon or obfuscation. He was fiendishly efficient and an accomplished administrator. As a chairman he was unsurpassed at summing up the discussions.

However, Trendall left for the ANU in Canberra in 1954, so the other academic in the department, senior lecturer James Rivers Barrington Stewart (1913–62), became acting head, though he was not appointed Professor until 1960. Classical (art history) archaeologists like Trendall and excavating archaeologists like Stewart are often at odds, but not in their case. Trendall, who revelled in poking about dusty museum stores, including the Nicholson Museum's, described himself as "more a dirty than a dirt archaeologist", and supported Stewart's work.

While Trendall was organised and a prodigious intellect, Stewart was colourful and idiosyncratic. Stewart devised a scheme to solve the problem of inadequate working conditions at Sydney. He basically seceded from the university in 1951 and often took his students, including Kevin, up to the

family home near Bathurst, where he was a "gentleman farmer" (**plate 10**).<sup>27</sup> Students had to feed Eve Stewart's turkeys, and even though conditions in the house were Spartan (**plate 11**), Stewart had a magnificent library of archaeological books. He was, moreover, the only teacher that I recall Kevin mentioning.

Stewart had inherited the family seat *Mount Pleasant*, northwest of Bathurst on Ophir Road. Lieutenant-Governor General William Stewart had added 12,000 acres to his 3,200 acre land grant made in 1826, and retired there in 1832. His son James had George Allen Mansfield re-design "The Mount" in the 1870s as a Scottish baronial fantasy, perched on a knoll dominating lush paddocks on the flats beneath.

Seven years after Professor Stewart died, in 1969 Rex Morgan bought the dilapidated house, patiently restoring and furnishing it. The Morgan family now organises tours and events at the renamed *Abercrombie House* to help pay its way (**plates 12-13**).

Kevin's university days had all the ingredients that inspired and developed his interest in Australiana. He was surrounded by historic buildings, historic houses and historic interiors. Though he took four history courses, it was his two years of academic training in archaeology that critically combined historical research with the study of artefacts.

Stewart taught small classes, so Kevin armed himself with information, ready for interrogation at any time, and further developed his love of libraries and

## 17.

The dining room at *Government House*, Parramatta. Kevin helped acquire the furnishings for the house.

Photo John Wade

## 18.

Members of the Australiana Fund, 3 March 1978, at *Yarralumla*. The front row is George Joseph, Andrew Grimwade, Lady Cowen, Sir Zelman Cowen, Mrs Tamie Fraser, Dame Helen Blaxland, Lady McNicoll and Dr Clifford Craig. Kevin is on the left end of the second row. Photo courtesy The Australiana Fund

scholarship. Kevin would have learned how to look at objects and extract stories from them, how to integrate the study of objects and written records, and the thrill of discovery through research. Kevin completed his university studies in 1957.

At university, he met people who shared his interests. They included Leo Schofield, who was one of a group of historic house buffs who paid 10 shillings each to visit *Fernhill* at Mulgoa one summer afternoon. When a grass fire broke out and the students extinguished it with wet wheat sacks, the grateful owner refunded their entry fees.<sup>28</sup>

## After university

How did he come to study colonial Australia? Kevin emerged from university with the academic skills to undertake the study of historic artefacts. He was one of



**19.**

Cedar bookcase that had belonged to the poet Dorothea Mackellar, as used in Kevin's study. Photo John Wade

**20.**

John Baird, carved shale medallion of W B Dalley, barrister and politician, dated 1885. Photo John Wade

the first to realise the need to learn about our own country's past, that the historical sources he would need to consult were generally and readily available here, and that artefacts were also historical documents.

Kevin's father Frank died the year he graduated with his BA, 1958. His father's hard work, entrepreneurial approach and investments had left the family financially comfortable. The same year, Kevin squired his mother at his sister Judy's wedding to Vincent Moran (**plate 14**).

Kevin was active in the unsuccessful campaigns to stop the demolition in 1961 of *St Malo*, Didier Joubert's c 1856 historic house at nearby Hunter's Hill, instead of an adjacent pub, to make way for a freeway, and the destruction of Hannibal Macarthur's *The Vineyard (Subiaco)*, a few suburbs west at Rydalmere, in the same year, to provide an employees' car park.

Developers were rampant, many houses succumbing to the rage for

home units. These events galvanised the National Trust and its influential Women's Committee into action. Kevin joined the National Trust in 1962, serving on eight of the Trust committees. That year, he lent a pair of hall chairs and a cedar corner cupboard from his own collection to the pioneer exhibition of *Australiana* at Hunter's Hill.<sup>29</sup>

Journalist Terry Ingram reported one of Kevin's forays into collecting in the *Australian Financial Review*. A woman he visited had a cedar four-poster with a Labrador sprawled on it. Kevin, ever the diplomat, admired her dog, Mowbray, to disguise his real interest – the bed. She died soon after, thoughtfully leaving him the item he had singled out – Mowbray.<sup>30</sup>

When he broke his back in a skiing accident in 1963, Kevin's future was perilous. He was not expected to survive, but he and his doctors never gave up. Eventually, he was able to walk, using a cane. When he first attempted to walk,

his brother-in-law Vincent Moran said "Kevin walked on courage alone". As it turned out, Mowbray was more help to him than the four-poster bed.

Later, on a visit to the National Gallery of Victoria, he carried round the galleries a whalebone scrimshaw cane he'd bought in Tasmania. Kevin soon noticed people were staring at him. He fumbled with his fly to make sure it was done up. Then he realised they were thinking, "why is a blind man looking at art?"

In 1967, he encouraged Judy Birmingham, senior lecturer in Near Eastern archaeology at the University of Sydney, to excavate in Australia – specifically at James King's pottery at Irrawang near Raymond Terrace, which Kevin had located (**plate 15**). As a bumptious young student, I excavated on the site for several seasons, and remember Kevin motoring up to inspect the work and the finds (**plate 16**) in his ageing but dignified dark blue Mercedes.

In the 1960s and 1970s Kevin was instrumental in helping furnish *Old Government House*, *Hambleton Cottage* and *Experiment Farm Cottage* at Parramatta for the National Trust (**plate 17**). Always charming, amusing and erudite, he worked closely with the formidable ladies (“cherry bows”) of the Women’s Committee, notably Cherry Jackaman, Dame Helen Blaxland, Joan Furber and Caroline Simpson. In NSW, they, as much as anyone, were responsible for growing our appreciation of Australiana.

He whizzed about seeking furniture for the houses, with a risible budget of maybe \$50 to spend without authority. He tried to beat dealers down so he would not have to refer purchases to a committee, and slow down the acquisition process.

### The fruitful seventies

Kevin, Nursie and his mother Nellie moved to their 1920s Californian bungalow at 28 Madeline Street, Hunter’s Hill in 1970. Two years later came his first book, *Early Colonial Furniture*, compiled with Dr Clifford Craig and Dr E Graeme Robertson. I infer that Cliff provided the introductions to collectors and wrote some text, while Kevin wrote the majority and Graeme took the photos.

John Hawkins organised an exhibition *Australian Silver 1800-1900* held at *Lindesay* at Darling Point for the National Trust in 1973. Kevin, Marjorie Graham and Fred Hodges contributed biographies to the book of the same name. The next year, Kevin wrote an introduction to the reprinted catalogue of the Lithgow Pottery.

Kevin was an organiser and contributor to the broader exhibition *Antiques Australia – First Fleet to Federation* shown from 9–17 October 1976 at *Lindesay*. Publisher David Ell, himself a collector, was quick to see a publishing opportunity and the original small black and white booklet was expanded into a handsome and very successful colour hardback book in 1977. Kevin’s furniture chapter was its most substantial essay.

I met Kevin again regularly in 1975, 40 years ago, when I joined the curatorial staff of the old Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Ultimo NSW. My predecessor, Anne Bickford, had recognised the importance of Australian decorative arts and had nominated Kevin and Marjorie Graham as honorary associates to advise in the field of Australiana; Bill Bradshaw was another. Kevin and Marjorie regularly came in to mentor enthusiastic kids like me and my colleague Margie Betteridge. They encouraged us to collect Australiana, to get out and seek material from dealers and auctions, to meet private collectors, to join collector organisations, mount temporary exhibitions and write for publications. At the time, this was pretty revolutionary in the museum, which was then quite antiquated (but about to be re-born under the government of Neville Wran).

Kevin in those days was still working occasional shifts in the family’s Railway Hotel at Lidcombe, and I recall going out to meet him working in the bar. His bar work reinforced how to be affable and to get on with everyone. He enjoyed company and would often telephone his friends and family; he would update us on news about Australiana, or tell us where to get a book we should have (especially if it was remaindered).

This period was the heyday of Australiana, and Kevin was one of the great pioneers. He was a foundation vice-president of the Australiana Society, and spoke on “Australiana and the private collector” at the Society’s first meeting on 2 December 1978. We shared a double bill which included a show-and-tell. I remember been shown a pot, and commenting that it was usual for makers to put a mark under the base. So I turned it up, and there it was, the inscribed word “Mark”. Not the highlight of my career.

Kevin’s interests extended to Tamie Fraser’s Australiana Fund, also established in 1978 (**plate 18**), to furnish the Australian government’s four official houses in Canberra and Sydney. In those days, the public rooms in places like *Kirribilli House* were drab, shabbily arranged and re-arranged by the spouses of the Governor-General or



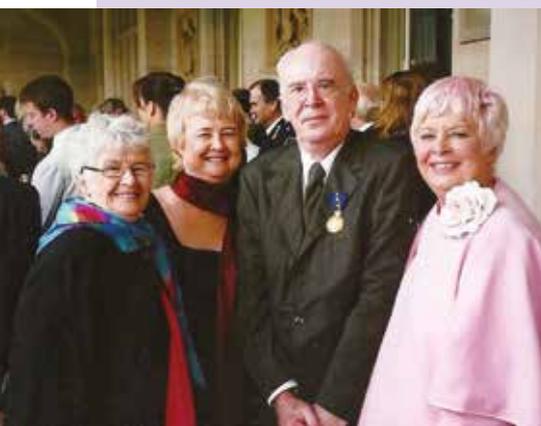
### 21.

Grace Seccombe, pottery kookaburras, c 1950s, that Kevin bought in an op shop. Photo John Wade

Prime Minister at the time. Mrs Fraser felt strongly that this was no longer appropriate for houses that were showcased regularly to Australian and foreign dignitaries, and would be opened on occasions for the people to view.

About this time Kevin visited the USA, where the State Department Reception Rooms in Washington DC made a lasting impression. Kevin enthusiastically supported the Australiana Fund in acquiring items that demonstrated Australian craftsmanship to decorate the four official establishments. He contributed some pieces himself.

He also visited Ireland, the family homeland. At the National Museum in Dublin, he asked to see the gold cup presented in 1854 to William Smith O’Brien, the Irish rebel convict who had been given a conditional pardon.<sup>31</sup> They scurried around and found it, embarrassingly stored in a cupboard



## 22.

The tail end of an Australiana Society visit to Christian da Silva's furniture conservation workshop in 2004: Diana Damjanovic, Caressa Crouch, Kevin Fahy and Carl Gonsalves chatting about Australiana while they stuff copies of *Australiana* magazine into envelopes, suitably fuelled with leftover wine, cheese, biscuits and fruit. Photo John Wade

## 23.

A proud moment: Kevin Fahy at *Government House* Sydney, with his sisters Judy, Rosilea and Helen, after receiving his AM from Her Excellency the Governor Dame Marie Bashir in 2002

under a sink. Thanks to Kevin, today it's one of just 25 highlights from the decorative arts and history collections in a display called "Curator's Choice".

## Collector

While Kevin had some very fine pieces of furniture of his own, notably his cedar secretaire bookcase, his Dorothea Mackellar bookcase (**plate 19**), sofa table, Clarke work table and his six-legged sideboard, he was not an obsessive collector and his interests were broad.

He had several kerosene shale medallions carved by the Sydney postman John Baird (**plate 20**), a long case clock with the dial inscribed for Thomas Rudd, Tasmanian silver picture frames, kangaroo bookends and a rustic chair covered with kangaroo fur.

In the 1980s, he gave a collection of Lithgow pottery, two emu eggs carved by Jonaski Takuma, a Liebenritt terracotta plaque and two Australian gold brooches which had belonged to his mother to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS). He gave a dozen pieces of Australian pottery to the Australiana Fund, and sold 80 pieces to MAAS, a sideboard to the National Gallery of Australia, and a marble-top table to Sydney Living Museums (then known as the Historic Houses Trust of NSW). The National Trust would have received pieces too.

I never met Kevin's mother, which is partly why she has been largely absent from the story so far. When she died in 1984, his old school friend Errol Lea-Scarlett wrote a beautiful, tender letter to her two youngest grandsons.

Errol wrote

Your grandmother changed little through all those 40 and more years. Her great care in personal appearance, her beautiful hair, the round, smiling face, bright friendly eyes and rich, melodious voice that you knew were all the same in 1942. She was the perfect mould of a lady, reared to be considerate of others while remaining always poised and assured in herself... After the war ended, 'The House',

of which Kevin spoke so often, was restored as the family's residence ... 72 Wright's Road [was] a spacious, late Victorian home, fronted by terraced lawns separating it from the river. ... in The House were many elegant and rare objects ... Before long, Kevin's interest in antiques quickened under the impulse of his mother's good taste.

Were not for this letter, which his niece Julieanne Watson showed me, I would never have realised how important Kevin's mother Nellie had been in forming his interest in decorative arts. These words were, remember, written by someone who had met Kevin when they were both just nine years old. With Kevin and his family, you were a friend for life. (Julianne confided to me that Nanna was her best friend).

## Storyteller

Kevin loved exploring people's foibles and was renowned for his practical jokes. One involved the collector and publisher David Ell, then living at Hunter's Hill on a large leafy block. An Indian family moved in next door, and Kevin seized the opportunity to torment David.

Obtaining a copy of the Council papers, he slipped in an extra page – a development application for a Hindu temple next to David – and casually passed it on to David, as any good neighbour would. As Kevin told the story, David engaged a QC to attend the Council meeting, where everyone was nonplussed about the mythical proposal.

Some tales related to his collecting activities, and the ruses necessary to acquire what he wanted. There was the man with the Oatley clock whose amateur painting and singing Kevin had to endure, the meals-on-wheels lady who spied out stuff for him, and of course the completely apocryphal story of the silver wine cooler in a shop window in New York. Or going to see dealer Stan Lipscombe on a Monday morning; a jovial Stan meant he'd had a win at the races on Saturday, and that he might share his good fortune by parting with something at a reasonable price.

## Publications

Kevin was of course a foundation member of the Australiana Society, editor of this magazine, committee member and president. He would also pitch in and do the work (plate 22) and was always a joy to work with because of his endearing nature as well as his fund of stories and information.

Kevin came to know all the auctioneers and dealers of Australiana. He knew all the curators and major collectors and was happy to help anyone who shared his interests. More often than not, they approached him rather than the other way round; he always replied to genuine enquirers. These connections were invaluable in locating works for illustrations, and led to a series of valuable reference books, with excellent photographs by his friend Andrew Simpson.

All Kevin's books were collaborative works. That says a lot about him as a person – a team player, supportive, encouraging, mentoring, contributing and drawing the best out of his collaborators. Kevin's expertise in Australiana was focused on colonial domestic interiors, and he guided others along that path. That's not to say he wasn't interested in other things.

All his books follow the same successful formula: a general introductory essay canvassing the issues, detailed biographies of individual craftspeople, plus lots of illustrations. The later ones on jewellery and pottery, more than the others, contained a large number of women artists. His work was recognised with the award of an AM in 2002 (plate 23).

Kevin and his collaborators produced definitive books on furniture, jewellery, silver and ceramics. More than anyone, Kevin was responsible for the scholarly study of Australian colonial decorative arts. He had a wonderful capacity to write succinctly and to claim no more than the facts would allow. Since he died, with few exceptions, the flow of books has all but dried up.

Kevin developed heart and lung problems and was admitted to St Vincent's Hospital in late January 2007. When it became clear he would not survive, hospital staff moved the childless, unmarried man to a secluded corner. Family members got on the phone immediately and within a couple

of hours, staff were amazed that 30 or 40 tearful people had gathered around Kevin's bed. There would have been more if it hadn't been family only.

## Legacy

Kevin's legacy is not just his research, publications and friendships. He transformed the idea of Australiana from the trivial "football, meat pies, kangaroos and Holden cars" to show that there was genuine craftsmanship, style, cultural value and history here. Kevin's works all emphasise the work, skills and creativity of our craftspeople, and the way Australians have been influenced by the native flora, fauna, landscape and local materials. He had an unrivalled capacity to synthesise the state of our knowledge of Australian decorative arts.

Kevin early on realised that knowledge of Australia's past – both through history and its physical remains – helps us understand both the past and the present, and enables us to establish an Australian identity. Not in a way that divides us, or strengthens nationalistic jingoism, but shows us how Australians, of all backgrounds, came together.

Many authors, collectors, conservators, curators, dealers and scholars have contributed to the recognition, preservation and understanding of Australia's artefacts and arts. None has done more than Kevin Fahy. He was a model friend and colleague. If there is one quality that sums up Kevin best, it is selfless. We will remember him with great respect and affection for many years yet.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kevin's family has been very supportive in supplying information and photographs and I would like especially to thank his sister Judy Moran and niece Julieanne Watson.

## NOTES

1. James Bertouch, "Kevin Fahy, an interview by Jim Bertouch" *Australiana* May 2010, 32 no 2 pp 20–29; Nov 2010, 32 no 4 pp 32–38; Feb 2011, 33 no 1 pp 30–38.
2. John Wade, *SMH* 3 Mar 2007; John Wade, *Australiana* 2007; *National Trust magazine* 2007.
3. *The Australian* 6 Jun 1827 p 3; see *India, China, Australia* p 166.
4. Son of James (d 1928) and Kate (BDM 29381/1895)
5. *Catholic Press* 1 Mar 1928 p 29.
6. *Catholic Press* 5 Jan 1939 p 15.
7. *Maitland Mercury* 16 Dec 1854 p 2.
8. *Freeman's Journal* 30 Apr 1881 p 16.
9. *SMH* 9 Jun 1882 p 3.
10. c 1852–1 June 1903.
11. "Maclurcan, Hannah (1860–1936)", *ABD Supp* 2005.
12. *N Qld Register* 20 Apr 1898 p 26.
13. *Sydney Mail* 31 Mar 1920 p 28
14. *Evening News* 6 Dec 1920 p 8.
15. He was at the Town Hall Hotel, Balmain in 1928 and 1929 *SMH* 3 Feb 1928 p 11 & 18 Sep 1929 p 11
16. *Freeman's Journal* 11 Jun 1925 p 16; *Catholic Press* 18 Jun 1925 p 21.
17. *SMH* 26 June 1929 p 13.
18. *SMH* 23 Apr 1930 p 10
19. *SMH* 7 Jan 1933 p 12
20. Born 8 Feb 1935; *SMH* 13 Feb 1935 p 12.
21. Born 2 June 1937; *SMH* 12 Jun 1937 p 16.
22. *Catholic Press*, 8 Sept 1938 p 9
23. *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 31 Aug 1939 p 29.
24. Even then the house had probably had its verandahs bricked in, and grounds sold off for Housing Commission fibro cottages.
25. *Catholic Weekly* 25 Jan 1945 p 6.
26. *SMH* 8 Jan 1954 p 9; *SMH* 12 Jan 1854 p 7
27. On the Stewarts, see J. Powell, *Love's Obsession: The Lives and Archaeology of Jim and Eve Stewart*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town SA 2013.
28. Leo Schofield, *Australiana* Nov 1988 p 99.
29. Miriam Hamilton & Jane Kelso, *Australiana* Aug 2011 pp 36–38.
31. *Australiana* May 2002 p 57
31. Kevin Fahy, "The William Smith O'Brien presentation gold cup", *Australian Antique Collector* 21, 1981, pp 115–117.



**John Wade** trained in archaeology at the University of Sydney, and taught there before joining the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney as curator of decorative arts in 1975. He was a foundation member of the Australiana Society in 1978, edited its publications off and on, and served as president 1999–2006.