

= John Hirst (historian) =

John Bradley Hirst FASSA (9 July 1942 ? 3 February 2016) was an Australian historian and commentator . He has been described as an " historian , public intellectual , and active citizen " . Born in Adelaide , Hirst attended Unley High School and undertook his undergraduate and postgraduate study at the University of Adelaide . Abandoning an early desire to become a Methodist Minister , in 1968 he was appointed a lecturer at Melbourne 's new La Trobe University , where he remained until the end of his career . His wife and fellow @-@ student Christine accompanied him to Melbourne . They had two children , Catherine and David . Hirst was subsequently head of department and Reader in History at La Trobe . He retired in 2006 , and was an Emeritus Scholar at La Trobe until his death . Hirst had a distinguished career " in teaching , supervision and research . He developed new subjects and methodologies to teach them . In addition to those concerning Australian history there was his pioneering subject designed to inform students about Australia 's European cultural heritage . " This work was published as *The Shortest History of Europe* and has been translated into nine languages (Swedish , Greek , Chinese , Spanish , German , Portuguese , Russian , Turkish and Korean) . Hirst was seconded to the University of Melbourne to edit *Historical Studies* , Australia 's leading historical journal , from 1977 to 1980 . In retirement , he travelled regularly to Sydney to instruct , without remuneration , groups of post @-@ graduate students in thesis writing .

= = Academic contribution = =

Hirst produced a large number of important articles , chapters and books on Australian history . His academic interests were wide @-@ ranging , including social , cultural and political history . Hirst 's goal was to elucidate the qualities and characteristics of Australian society and how they had developed . Jeremy Sammut has described him as " an elegant and outstanding stylist , as adept at clarifying complex issues by reducing them to their essentials as he was at crafting the pithy line that eliminated all doubt his interpretation was true and correct " . In his historical work , Hirst 's colleague at La Trobe University , Alan Frost , has noted that Hirst " challenged orthodoxies and produced many new insights " . He wrote two seminal books on colonial New South Wales which Frank Bongiorno has described as displaying " a raw intellectual power " : *Convict Society and its Enemies* (1983) and *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (1988) (both reprinted as *Freedom on the Fatal Shore* in 2008) . *Convict Society and its Enemies* was particularly influential , arguing that rather than being a brutal slave society , early New South Wales was a place where rights and freedoms were well @-@ established from the beginning . Hirst 's study of Federation , *The Sentimental Nation* , was also a ground @-@ breaking work , arguing that national sentiment was more important than economics in uniting the nation . Alan Frost has described Hirst 's shorter analyses as notable : " *Distance in Australia : Was It a Tyrant ?* " (1975) , his response to Geoffrey Blainey 's most famous concept , " deserves much more attention than it now receives " ; his " *Egalitarianism* " (1986) challenges " received wisdom about colonial life " . Many of his best shorter pieces were collected in *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (2009) . A major achievement of Hirst 's was a project to index the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper (1860 ? 1909) .

= = Public intellectual = =

Frank Bongiorno described Hirst as a " creative historian capable of engaging a wide audience , as well as a public intellectual who delighted , infuriated and provoked " . He contributed many influential opinion pieces and commentaries to leading Australian newspapers and journals . Jeremy Sammut has noted that Hirst was motivated by an independent mind and a distaste for unthinking conformity . He " defied simplistic categorisation as a partisan because his politics were idiosyncratic " . Hirst described himself as an old @-@ fashioned social democrat . To read Hirst is not to encounter a reactionary but " to be delighted as he marshals facts , logic and evidence with unarguable skill and precision to establish the heterodox case , while conveying powerful insights

into whatever historical experience or process is discussed " . A common theme in the obituaries cited is that Hirst was fearlessly honest , whatever the subject . As Sammut has noted , he was inspired by a commitment to " the rigorous pursuit of historical truth that drove him to explore the deeper patterns and meanings of the past , and the contemporary implications , that others had missed or misled us about " .

= = Public appointments = =

Never an ivory tower academic , Hirst held a number of influential appointments during the course of his career . He was a member of the Prime Minister 's Republic Advisory Committee , the chair of the Commonwealth Civics Education Group , a member of the Film Australia Board , a council member of the National Museum of Australia , and a member of the board of Old Parliament House in Canberra . He wrote the official history of Australia for new citizens and took a prominent part in the history summit convened by Prime Minister John Howard in 2006 . Hirst advised the Victorian Government on the school history curriculum and was history adviser to the National Curriculum Authority . He was elected to the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in 1986 . A committed republican , Hirst was the Convenor of the Republican Movement in Victoria .

Hirst died on 3 February 2016 at the age of 73 .