

Proposal for Award of Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters

Professor Graeme Davison

Graeme John Davison has made a major contribution to historical scholarship and the public appreciation of Australian history and heritage.

His academic career began with an Honours degree in history at this University followed by a Diploma of Education, and his early achievement was recognised by the award of the Rhodes Scholarship for Victoria in 1964. After further study at Oxford, Graeme Davison undertook doctoral research in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. He was a member of the Melbourne History Department until in 1982 he became a Professor of History at Monash. Since then he has served as Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard in 1988-89 and a visitor in the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities at Edinburgh in 1994.

The publication in 1978 of his book on *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* established Davison as Australia's leading urban historian. It evinced some of his enduring interests in the material and social aspects of city life, how cities work and how they change, as well as his particular attachment to this city in its nineteenth-century heyday. Recently reissued, it is an enduring work that must be read by anyone seeking to understand the formation of Australian suburban life. He is now directing a major study of post-war Melbourne and provided essential leadership in the preparation of the recently published *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*.

Professor Davison's historical research is deeply versed in the social sciences, attentive to the visual forms and literary imagination; his writing is lucid and graceful, constantly offering fresh insights. These qualities are apparent in his contribution to the bicentennial history of Australia in 1888, his pathbreaking study of the uses of time in Australia and most recently in his history of the impact of the car. They extend to seminal articles on such subjects as old age, the bush ethos and how it was codified, and the rural crisis.

Graeme Davison's interest in the city's fabric took him to the study of heritage and conservation, and from that into the uses and abuses of history more generally. At Monash he created a postgraduate program, the first of its kind in Australia, to train graduates for careers as commissioned historians and heritage consultants. He collaborated in the publication of a handbook on heritage, and from 1983 to 1987 chaired the Historic Buildings Council of Victoria. He has also served on the governing bodies of the Library Council of Victoria, the National Trust and the National Archives. More recently, Professor Davison provided expert and temperate advice to the National Museum at a time when its exhibitions were subjected to ill-informed and partisan criticism, and has produced a history of the Power House Museum in Sydney.

His standpoint is liberal and inclusive, attentive to the different uses of history and scrupulous in maintaining the integrity of the discipline. With John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre he edited the major reference work, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, and more recently he has written of *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*. His books are beautifully written, using vivid detail to analyse and explain important and complex subjects. They have the interpretative reach and the empirical backing of a profound scholar.