

**PROFESSOR LYNDAL ROPER,
REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, OXFORD**

Professor Lyndal Roper is the first woman, the first Australian and the first graduate of the University of Melbourne, to hold the Regius Chair in History at the University of Oxford. This is the oldest and most distinguished chair of history in Britain and has been occupied by some of the most famous and important historians working in Britain since its establishment by George I in 1724. It is an extraordinary achievement and an achievement that shows how far Professor Roper has gone and how much she has achieved since graduating with first class honours in History from the University of Melbourne in 1977. Inspired by her teachers here, and especially by those teachers who taught her about some of the wilder moments of the German Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Professor Roper has engaged since the early 1980s in one of the most concentrated and intellectually inspiring investigations into the intersections of psychology, gender and history that any contemporary historian has done. She has made witches both real and understandable while also showing that we cannot understand them without a deep knowledge of the particular cultural, social and psychological milieu of the German Reformation. That milieu, or *mentalité*, to use a word historians prefer to use when discussing the ambience of an age, helps make explicable what to contemporary minds seem inexplicable: why people believed in witches and why some people accused of witchcraft also considered themselves witches.

Professor Roper became Regius Chair at Oxford because of the power of her scholarship. She is the author of three powerful and paradigm-shifting monographs, each on different aspects of witchcraft and witch hunting in the German Reformation. In her first book, she asked how the reformation changed conceptions of gender and described in great detail the workings of 'holy households' in Augsburg. She is returning to some of those themes once more in her current project, a large biography of Martin Luther. In her second book, the highly acclaimed masterpiece, *Oedipus and the Devil*, she drew on serious research into psychology to understand better the psychology of witchcraft in Germany, along with forays into the literary culture of sixteenth century Germany. Taking psychoanalysis seriously, she offers a nuanced approach to understanding the psychological obsessions of the early modern period, drawing expertly on theories by Klein and Freud. In her third monograph, *Witch Craze*, she developed this theme more systematically, so as to explain the role of unconscious fantasy in history. This study encompassed areas of human experience that often elude the historical record, realms such as fantasy, envy and terror. It brought the physical and psychological together. It won the Roland H Bainton Prize. Her next book deals with the witch as figure in western imagination.

Professor Roper has many intellectual distinctions, such as being a fellow of the British Academy and a fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. She is a past editor of *Past and Present*, Britain's pre-eminent historical journal. Not least of her honours is that she is an Honorary Professor within History in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies. Her appointment

as Regius Chair is recognition of the extraordinary intellectual contributions and continuing brilliance of this extremely gifted historian.