

Australian National Placenames Survey

Report for calendar year 2001

The Australian National Placenames Survey has been funded by an ARC/DETYA grant via the Special Projects Fund of the Learned Academies Scheme. The amount of funding for 2001 was \$67,895, following earlier grants from the same source to the pilot National Place Names Project of \$68,700 in 1998 and \$90,000 in 1999 and to the ANPS proper of \$132,255 in 2000. A statement of the actual expenditure of project funds in 2001 has been submitted by Macquarie University's Office of Financial Services.

Project objectives

The task of the Survey is to investigate the history, meaning, and motivation for use of each name ever current for a geographic feature or inhabited place in Australia, and to make public the results of this research.

Personnel

David Blair, Head of Humanities at Macquarie University, has continued his role as (honorary) Director of the ANPS. The reduced funding for 2001 against the figure for 2000 has meant a curtailment of paid staffing. Research Fellow **Flavia Hodges** has been employed for only two days per week from March. IT Officer **Robert Iverach** returned to Perth at the end of 2000 to complete his PhD thesis at Curtin University of Technology. Research Associate **Susan Poetsch** has continued to be employed for four days per week throughout the year, supported in part by a Macquarie University External Collaborative Research Grant for a project carried out jointly with the NSW Geographical Names Board.

Caroline Henderson-Brooks, a Macquarie University PhD candidate in Linguistics, has been casually employed on a terminological project carried out under a Macquarie University Research Grant (see further below).

Dale Lehner and **Bill Noble** have continued as Honorary Research Associates of the ANPS, and have been joined by **Joyce Miles**, who has researched and published on house names throughout the world, and has a broad interest in placenames and history.

The ANPS **Steering Committee** consists, in addition to David Blair and Bill Noble, of Dr Lawrence Warner, Executive Director of the Australian Academy of the Humanities; Prof. Margaret Clunies Ross of the University of Sydney, council member and past President of the AAH; and Dr Bruce Moore, Director of the Dictionary Research Centre at the Australian National University.

Timescale

The work of the Survey will extend over several decades. For comparison, the English Place-Name Survey began its work in 1925, and is currently striving to complete initial coverage of the country by its centenary; after that many gaps will remain to be filled, as research methods have been refined with the progress of the project.

Achievements

We have continued to develop the network of 'Research Friends' of the ANPS, individual researchers into local and family history who contribute information to the Survey, and toward the end of the year launched a quarterly newsletter *Placenames Australia* in order to keep in touch with them.

David Blair, Flavia Hodges and Susan Poetsch attended the annual meeting of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia, of which the ANPS is a full member. The third day of the meeting was devoted to a seminar on placenames of Indigenous origin.

The collaborative project with the NSW Geographical Names Board was completed. The two model research studies, on the placenames of the Mudgee local government area and of a group of parishes around Botany Bay, will be used as the basis for training to be delivered to placename researchers in forums such as the Australian Linguistics Institute to be held at Macquarie University in July 2002 and the University's own program of Continuing Education.

A pilot project to develop a standard set of designations for geographic features to be used in information management systems was begun with funding from a Macquarie University Research Grant. The results of this will be presented at the meeting of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia in March 2002, and it is hoped that further funding to continue this work may be available from the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping.

Assessment of progress

During 2001 the Survey was able to maintain its activities but not move ahead with the same momentum as in 2000, largely due to the departure of the IT Officer and the lack of funding for a replacement. The directorate has built up a substantial network of contacts with individuals throughout Australia who are interested in contributing to the work of the Survey.

This needs to be carried further by devolved state/territory committees.

Challenges

The most serious challenge is the lack of IT expertise available to the ANPS, and the consequent

lack of a functional database. Former IT Officer Rob Iverach, now back in Perth, has been able to do a small amount of work under a Macquarie University Research Development Grant, and Curtin students Deborah Morley and Kerry Rotumah have also taken an interest in the work of the Survey. We hope that it may be possible to set up a formal collaboration with that university, but financial issues remain unresolved. There is also a chance of receiving limited support in the form of student project involvement from the computer science departments of both Macquarie and Sydney University, but coordinating these in the absence of any IT expertise dedicated to the Survey will be a challenge. The Survey has recently obtained funding under a Macquarie University Research Quantum Grant to finance a two-week visit from Rob Iverach to discuss ways forward.

The WA committee formed at the end of 2000 has not been active, and it is not easy to stimulate its members from a distance. We are now hopeful of forming the first active state committee in Victoria, under the enthusiastic leadership of local historian and member of the Vicnames Advisory Committee Chris Richards.

Future directions

The ANPS is now a key part of the broader Asia Pacific Institute for Toponymy established at Macquarie University in November 2001. The Institute will be funded for a period of five years at a level of \$120,000 from the Vice-Chancellor's Millennium Innovations Fund, and will carry out its work by means of three functional sections.

Its *Historical and Cultural Toponymy* section will be the home of the core activities of the ANPS, and will function as the central resource for studies in Australian toponymy. The *Education and Training* section will develop a variety of teaching programs embracing both the standardisation issues important to those working for government agencies and the cultural aspects relevant to those investigating placenames from historical, linguistic, and sociological viewpoints. The *Technical Toponymy* section will be responsible for building an international presence to establish Australia and the region as significant contributors to methodological innovation and models of international best practice in issues of standardisation and technical toponymic research.