

PROFESSOR CHARLES THOMAS STANNAGE



AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY TEACHER OF THE YEAR 1997 THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DISCIPLINE

History

RESEARCH AREAS

British History
Australian Modern History
West Australian History
Aboriginal and Islander History

► Obituary: tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1031461X.2016.1157848

IMPACT ON CAREER

In 1998, following his Teacher of the Year Award, he moved to Curtin University into a role of Executive Dean of Humanities. He and Professor Richard Nile collaborated in a partnership with the University of Queensland Press and Fremantle Art Centre to create what was an important concentration of Australian studies publications. He retired in 2005 from Curtin and became a member of the Council of The Smith Family (2009 – 11) where he was able to devote time to charitable concerns. He co-authored a history of St Mark's Anglican Church in Bassendean, where his father had been rector, which was his last book. Jenny Gregory in her Obituary spoke of Tom as having "a strong commitment to faith, family and community ... throughout Tom's career. He often painted himself as a suburban boy, championing local studies and fighting to save the heritage of his home suburb, Subiaco. Just prior to his death, he was working on a speech about local government amalgamations, seeing these as an assault on community democracy. Tom's death from a heart attack, at the age of only 68, was a great shock to all whose lives he had touched."

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2006 Was on a panel of five to select The West Australian's 100 most influential people in WA and was also invited by Federal Minister for Education, Julie Bishop, to attend the Australian History Summit;
- 2004 Convened the steering committee that set up the Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences;
- 2001 Received the Centenary Medal;
- 1998 Became Executive Dean of Humanities at Curtin University;
- 1997 Member of the Order of Australia, and made Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences of Australia.

BACKGROUND

Professor Stannage graduated from the University of WA and completed his PhD at Cambridge. He completed more than 30 years at the University of Western Australia before moving to Curtin University in 1998 to take up the position of Executive Dean of Humanities.

SUMMARY

"Tom was a superb teacher – charismatic and inspirational – his impact was often transformational. Today we are used to controls around teaching: metrics, curriculum management, learning outcomes, etc. For Tom, they were anathema. In a paper written not long after winning the Prime Minister's Award, he laid out his views on teaching:

'I want us as teachers to embrace the playful, the ironic, the non-austere, the pastiche, and reject the master image's positivistic, technocentric, rationalist and universalising tendencies. To join with our wondrous students and their immense distrust of totalising discourses.'

Such views were reflected in the legendary History 104, his first year unit in Australian history, which for nearly two decades attracted around 150 students each year. As he wrote in the unit handout, '[i]t is not enough to know what happened, one must seek to understand how and why things happened as they did, what the consequences were, and how our perceptions of people and events have been shaped'. Tutorials were structured around debates in Australian history and his lectures were always stimulating. Tom had things to say that mattered and he built a strong honours and postgraduate school in Australian history."

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IMPACT ON LEARNING & TEACHING

After 2000, the popularity of the first-year Australian History subject needed to be renewed. It was rewritten as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Histories and Modern Australia'. The then Director of UWA's Centre for Aboriginal Programs, Jill Milroy, joined Tom as unit coordinator. He later moved on to teach upper-level units in British history and he devised new units drawn on the subject of his PhD and his first book, 'Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition' (1980).