Archaeologist who thrived on mateship

The Australian archaeologist Rhys Jones died on 19 September after a three-year battle with leukaemia. His intellectual powers remained unimpaired to the end and, in the final weeks he managed to complete two papers in collaboration with his wife Betty Meehan. His death is a grievous loss to Aboriginal studies and world science.

Rhys Jones was born in Wales and spoke Welsh as his mother tongue. In 1959 he won a Trevelyan scholarship to Emmanuel College at Cambridge University, where he studied archaeology under Graham Clarke, Eric Higgs and Charles McBurney. In 1963 he took up an appointment as a Teaching Fellow in the Anthropology Department at Sydney University. Five years later he went to The Australian National University, where he stayed until his retirement in 1993. He was appointed to a personal Chair in 1993.

Rhys Jones is best known as a professor of archaeology in Indonesian, which confirmed prehistoric conti- nuities with mainland Australia and extended the story of human migration and adaptation to about separate origins. The Tasmanians had crossed Bass Strait by land bridge before the last of the glacier; and, in Jones’s estimation, their long isolation following the rise of sea levels 10,000 years ago had resulted in stagnation and devolution (for example, they lacked fire-making tools).

In 1977 Jones collaborated with filmmaker Tom Haydon, to produce a documentary, The Last Tasmanian. Although the title (referring to Trugannini) provoked an indignant reaction among mixed-race descendant-ants, the film brought home to a world audience the brutality with which the original inhabitants had been exterminated by British colonists. As Jones commented later during the “Stolen generations” debate, this really was genocide.

In the early ‘70s Jones joined Betty Meehan on a remote outstation in Arnhem Land, where she was studying the food-gathering activities of Arabi women. Through his subse- quent involvement in the region, Jones became increasingly alarmed by the re- sponses and activities of living people. Over the years (usually with Meehan as co-author) he wrote on diverse topics such as hunting tech- niques, diet, watercraft, dogs, colour concepts, indigenous science, the commodification of energy price subsidies next year as a measure that would protect market forces and conglomerates but harm ordinary Indonesians. He was particu- larly critical of the IMF, saying that: “it has already been three-and-a-half years since my country but so far, so bad.”

The second obstacle was that many Indonesians, in the euphoria of the past three years, had misin- terpreted reform and democracy as meaning “they can do anything.” They tended to forget their obliga- tions and responsibilities to the community and pursued their own causes in a way that often interfered on the rights of others. The final obstacle was the “stupidity” of the Indonesian bureaucracy that, he said, had lagged behind the reform agenda embraced by most of the community.

In response to questions about Australia’s handling of the boatpeople issue, he said that the arrest of four Indonesian sailors could “cause problems” in the bi- lateral relationship because these were poor fishermen and not boat- smugglers. He also thought Australia, as a large and wealthy nation, should show more compas- sion and agree to accept the refugees.

On the issue of the 11 September ter- rorist attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, Amien stated that he would support the “execution” of the terrorists pro- vided the US could furnish hard evidence of their involvement. He also expressed the fear, however, that many in the West may see all Muslims as sympathetic to terror- ism.

Greg Fealy
Pacific and Asian History, RSPAS

Burchill subject of Women of Influence lecture

Last month Dr Tara Brabazon (right), from Murdoch University’s School of Media Communication and Culture, spoke at the Women of Influence Lecture hosted by the ANU, about English journalist, Julie Burchill.

Her lecture, titled Making it Big: Bad Writing, Good Writing, tracked the journalistic career of the woman she terms the “Groucho Marx of media.”

Dr Brabazon said Burchill is the most famous journalist in Britain. Beginning her writing career at the age of 16 in 1975, Burchill wrote for New Musical Express, The Face, The Mail on Sunday and The Sun- day Times. She has also co-authored and authored numerous books in- cluding a biography on Princess Diana.

Burchill transformed writing into a glamorous, provocative, feminist enterprise, she said. “The role of the writer is always multi- tasking — moving between specialist and everyday knowledge and experiences.”

“She effortlessly connects politics inside and outside home. Like no other woman, her style is sharp, combining wit and poignancy.”

Dr Brabazon said Burchill’s suc- cess, as a strong feminist journalist, was reflective of the era in which she worked.

Burchill’s “pulling herself up by her shoulder pads’ attitude pro- vides a living example that the 1980s and 1990s was an era that rewarded the talented,” she said.

Dr Brabazon said Julie Burchill’s strength and tenacity render her a journalistic and feminist icon.

Leon Baker

Rais reflects on Indonesian leaders’ roles

Professor Amien Rais, the speaker of Indonesia’s supreme decision-making body, the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), addressed a large audience at the ANU’s Coombs Lecture Theatre on Wednesday, 15 September.


Although well known in his home country for his sharp and at times acerbic, criticisms, on this occasion he chose a more diplo- matic tone.

Habibie was given credit for ini- tiating many reforms and Abdurrahman was praised for hav- ing fostered freedom of the press and political expression.

While admitting to some disap- pointment over aspects of Megawati’s performance, Amien described her administration as the Indonesian bureaucracy that, he said, had lagged behind the reform agenda embraced by most of the community.

In response to questions about Australia’s handling of the boatpeople issue, he said that the arrest of four Indonesian sailors could “cause problems” in the bi- lateral relationship because these were poor fishermen and not boat- smugglers. He also thought Australia, as a large and wealthy nation, should show more compas- sion and agree to accept the refugees.

On the issue of the 11 September ter- rorist attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, Amien stated that he would support the “execution” of the terrorists pro- vided the US could furnish hard evidence of their involvement. He also expressed the fear, however, that many in the West may see all Muslims as sympathetic to terror- ism.

Greg Fealy
Pacific and Asian History, RSPAS

Burchill subject of Women of Influence lecture

Last month Dr Tara Brabazon (right), from Murdoch University’s School of Media Communication and Culture, spoke at the Women of Influence Lecture hosted by the ANU, about English journalist, Julie Burchill.

Her lecture, titled Making it Big: Bad Writing, Good Writing, tracked the journalistic career of the woman she terms the “Groucho Marx of media.”

Dr Brabazon said Burchill is the most famous journalist in Britain. Beginning her writing career at the age of 16 in 1975, Burchill wrote for New Musical Express, The Face, The Mail on Sunday and The Sun- day Times. She has also co-authored and authored numerous books in- cluding a biography on Princess Diana.

Burchill transformed writing into a glamorous, provocative, feminist enterprise, she said. “The role of the writer is always multi- tasking — moving between specialist and everyday knowledge and experiences.”

“She effortlessly connects politics inside and outside home. Like no other woman, her style is sharp, combining wit and poignancy.”

Dr Brabazon said Burchill’s suc- cess, as a strong feminist journalist, was reflective of the era in which she worked.

Burchill’s “pulling herself up by her shoulder pads’ attitude pro- vides a living example that the 1980s and 1990s was an era that rewarded the talented,” she said.

Dr Brabazon said Julie Burchill’s strength and tenacity render her a journalistic and feminist icon.

Leon Baker

Rais reflects on Indonesian leaders’ roles

Professor Amien Rais, the speaker of Indonesia’s supreme decision-making body, the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), ad- dressed a large audience at the ANU’s Coombs Lecture Theatre on Wednesday, 15 September.


Although well known in his home country for his sharp and at times acerbic, criticisms, on this occasion he chose a more diplo- matic tone.

Habibie was given credit for ini- tiating many reforms and Abdurrahman was praised for hav- ing fostered freedom of the press and political expression.

While admitting to some disap- pointment over aspects of Megawati’s performance, Amien described her administration as the