



Man of virtue ... Dick Hall, here in the Mitchell Library in 1994, revelled in the writing life. Photo: Jennifer Soo

DICK HALL 1937-2003 SKH 25.3.03
When Neville Wran became Premier of NSW, in 1976, he appointed Dick to his cultural affairs advisory body. Here, his longest lasting achievement was the Premier's literary awards, developed in concert with Donald Horne. Copied by other states, the NSW awards remain the richest of such annual prizes.

At the same time, Dick was appointed to the NSW State Library Council, the overseeing body of the state's public libraries. In 1980 he was elected president of the council, a position he held through annual election for four years. His closeness to the Premier ensured the building of a new general reference library for the State Library of New South Wales and the relocation of the Mitchell Library.

Publicly he was most engaged in

fiction, briefing papers, book reviews, magazine articles and the like. He ghosted books for Mick Young and Jack Hallam and, an early graduate of the NIDA playwrights' course, he saw two of his plays produced.

Twice he collaborated with friends on a book: with John Iremonger for *The Makers and the Breakers*, an examination of the 1975 constitutional crisis; and with Clem Lloyd in *Background Briefings*, a collection of John Curtin's wartime off-the-record briefings of journalists. In 1994 he won the inaugural James Joyce Foundation fellowship, which included a residency at Trinity College, Dublin.

His books were about policemen, criminals and spies, written with dash and insider knowledge. He got on well with

armband history' became fashionable as a pejorative term, he pulled together a lifetime's research and wrote swiftly *Black Armband Days*. More than a collection of essays on related themes, it is a powerful meditation on racial, sexual and social prejudice. He followed this with an investigation of the Windschuttle thesis which appeared in Peter Craven's *Best Australian Essays 2001*.

The year before, Craven had selected for inclusion in *Best Essays 2000*, Dick's introduction to his *Sydney: An Oxford Anthology*, perhaps his most lasting book. In it he displayed the wide reading, capacious memory and intellectual generosity which his friends treasured.

It is the book of a lover of Sydney, someone who had walked its lanes and streets, smelt its air, known its highs and lows - someone as unique as himself. Dick believed that in writing about a person's work, as in a book review, you should quote some of his words, to give the flavour. So let him have the last word here, from the Sydney anthology:

"A city is more than the sum of its setting, its landscapes, its buildings. It lives in its people, their conflicts and contradictions, their crudeness and their subtleties, their achievements and their failures, their virtues and their vices. It lives in this past and present. The visitors come and go, but the authentic voices of the city, in the end, come from its people."

Edmund Campion

Moorhouse recorded ... the night at Bon Gout restaurant when Dick, taunted to exasperation by a loudmouth ... settled the matter by dumping a jug of water over him.

the campaign to defend the free public library system against an unhealthy "user pays" ideology. Chairing the monthly council meetings, he was brisk, efficient and sympathetic to the staff (a sympathy repaid affectionately). He kept his eye on the clock, holding that the proper time to close the meeting for lunch was noon. All this was done without pay.

Meanwhile, he was getting on with his writing. Much of it was evanescent - speeches for poli-

knockabout coppers, who trusted him with their secrets. His penetration of the spy world ambience accounted for the success of two espionage thrillers, *Costello* and *Noumea*. It is a regret that he did not persist with this genre. But there were always calls to write other books on other topics.

Dick had contributed a chapter on Aboriginal history to Frank Stevens's pioneering *Racism in Australia* and had never lost his interest in the field. When "black