



AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY  
STUDY GUIDE  
CATHERINE SHIRLEY

# RAY WHITROD

(1915-2003) Policeman

SERIES 8

## INTRODUCTION

This program is an episode of *Australian Biography* (Series 8) produced by the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories - of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

## SYNOPSIS

Ray Whitrod came to national prominence when he resigned as Queensland's Commissioner of Police as a protest against corruption. It was a very public stand that enhanced his reputation as an officer of unusual integrity, dedicated to improving

standards and lifting the level of education within the force. In this interview, Ray looks back over a long and distinguished career, giving a fascinating insight into police culture.

Born in Adelaide in 1915, his memories of childhood are marked by his family's

*He took a strong stance against corruption and was dedicated to improving standards and lifting the level of education within the force.*



poverty - always leaving the table hungry, embarrassed at school by his cast-off clothes. Like many others during the Depression, he took a swag to the country looking for any job he could get - a time he describes as his lowest point.

Things changed when he met Mavis, seven years his senior and a teacher. She gave him a much-needed boost in confidence and her parents encouraged him to apply for the police force, where he was immediately made a detective due to the matriculation level he had attained at high school.

With the advent of World War Two, Ray joined the RAAF as a navigator. He had a hard time readjusting to family life after four intense years of fighting, but by the late 1940s, with the Cold War at its peak, Ray had settled down into a new role, helping to set up the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

Other appointments included head of the Commonwealth Investigation Service, which he helped transform into the Federal Police, and Police Commissioner in New Guinea before he accepted the controversial Queensland posting in 1970.

His reform efforts met with strong opposition, both from within the force and the Queensland Government. Finally, in

1976, he quit in outrage after Premier Jo Bjelke-Petersen insisted on promoting officers who were known to be corrupt. The resulting public controversy eventually led to the infamous Fitzgerald Inquiry.

After retirement, Ray Whitrod continued his commitment to serve the Australian public. He lectured in criminology at the Australian National University, worked with cancer patients, visited prisons and, together with his wife Mavis, was the driving force behind the establishment of the South Australian Victims of Crime Service.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

*Australian Biography: Ray Whitrod* will have interest and relevance for students from middle to senior secondary levels. Curriculum links include English, Modern History, Politics, Citizenship and Society Life Skills, Society and Culture, Media Studies and Legal Studies.

### BEFORE WATCHING

#### HISTORICAL & LEGAL CONTEXT

##### BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Ray Whitrod's early life and outlook were affected by his experiences during the

Great Depression, an economic slump which started in the US & Europe in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. The Depression affected all world economies and rendered millions of workers jobless. By 1932 the total value of world trade had fallen by more than half.

#### QUESTIONS

1. List the effects of the Depression on the Australian economy and workforce.
2. How did the Australian Government deal with unemployment of such a massive scale?
3. What effect did the Depression have on the education of average Australians?
4. How, internationally, did the Depression affect politics and the rise of extremist forces?

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLD WAR AND THE FORMATION OF ASIO

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) is Australia's security service. Australia had several security organisations between 1915 and 1949, beginning with the formation of a branch of the British 'Central Counter-Espionage Bureau' as part of an Empire-wide apparatus.

In the late 1940s the formation of the Soviet Bloc under the Warsaw Pact generated widespread public fear of a third World War and the era of Cold War confrontation began.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1949, Prime Minister Ben Chifley directed that a security service be established to counter security leaks from a 'spy ring' operating in Australia, which was being run from the Soviet Embassy.

*[Today] ASIO's main role is to gather information and produce intelligence that will enable it to warn the government about activities or situations that might endanger Australia's national security. The ASIO Act defines 'security' as the protection of Australia and its people from espionage, sabotage, politically motivated violence, the promotion of communal violence, attacks on Australia's defence system, and acts of foreign interference.*

ASIO focuses on terrorists, people who may act violently for political reasons, and people who may clandestinely obtain sensitive government information (spies) or otherwise harm Australia's interests in order to further their own causes or the interests of foreign governments.<sup>1</sup>

#### DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the threat posed to Australia by the Cold War, and how it was different in nature and threat from the previous World Wars.
2. Discuss the concept of the protection of the State by the establishment of a national security organisation within Australia.
3. Compare and contrast the original need for ASIO with its current role.
4. What are the checks and balances that need to be in place in a democracy when a security organisation is operating?

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT POLICING AND POWER

*Policing is a form of social control – “activities directed at preserving the security of a particular social order.”<sup>2</sup>*

*The reality is that the police fulfill a diversity of functions: including crime control, traffic control, combating terrorism. Underlying all their actions however is the power to wield legal sanctions and ultimately use force.*

*What clearly distinguishes the police is their legitimate right to use force - as the repository of the states monopolization of coercive powers in society.<sup>3</sup>*

#### DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss the relationship between police and citizens, outlining what a society should ideally expect of its police.
2. Discuss the role of education in assisting police to manage their jobs on a day to day basis.
3. Research background material that has been written about contemporary policing issues, paying particular attention to the groups in society who feel that they attract an undue amount of attention from police.

#### THE FITZGERALD INQUIRY INTO POLICE CORRUPTION

One of the most dramatic lapses in institutional and personal integrity in contemporary Australia was in the State of Queensland during the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1989, the Fitzgerald report set aside a whole chapter dealing with the notion of a ‘Police Culture’. The report detailed that as most police are recruited as school leavers, they enter an environment where they work and socialize almost exclusively with team mates. Fitzgerald made the

point that as contact with members of the public tended to be in situations of distress, conflict and hostility, members tended to retain the views and attitudes they brought into the Force. These attitudes became internalized, so that after years of service they became inflexible and outdated. By this time they had usually been promoted to a position of power.

*The existence of a siege mentality in some police cultures results in an emphasis of crime control over crime prevention, thereby isolating the police from the communities and the people they serve.*



*It moves police work in line with a re-active stance, as opposed to the desirable pro-active position.*

*When Sergeant Raymond Well Whitrod took over as Police Minister on 1 September 1970 his main aim for his three year term was to attempt to make corruption practically obsolete. This however was not to be the case, mainly due to the strong 'broderbond' nature of the Queensland police force. Of the eighteen charges of criminal nature against police officers that Whitrod sought, every one of these failed. This can be attributed to the strong code of loyalty amongst members. Johnston (1992: 281), writes of how this loyalty made it difficult to obtain evidence from a policeman that would lead to the conviction of another. This constitutes the notion of a police culture, thereby demonstrating the main obstacle opposing reform in the Queensland police force.*<sup>4</sup>

A Royal Commission into police corruption in Queensland painted a picture of a police force used as a political instrument of the ruling National Party. The former Queensland Minister for Transport named 14 cabinet members who he alleged had misused public funds for private expenses. Then State Premier, Sir Johannes (Joh) Bjelke-Petersen, stood trial on charges of corruption relating to A\$100,000 "political donations" wrapped in brown paper and left in his office. These charges were later reduced to perjury. During the inquiry, Fitzgerald was moved to say that he suspected this was perhaps, 'the tip of an enormous iceberg'.

The final report from the Fitzgerald Inquiry resulted in a number of significant reforms being implemented nationwide.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What was the political legacy of the Fitzgerald Inquiry?
2. What changes and controls on policing and police culture did the Inquiry precipitate, both in Queensland and the rest of Australia?
3. Discuss your understanding of the current relationship between police and politicians in your state or territory.

#### THE PLACE OF THE BIOGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

*Oral History is information about the past collected by interviewing people about their lives. It is an important source of information for family and personal history. Oral History interviews are pieces of historical evidence of a person's past experience or of events in their lives. It can be used with other pieces of evidence such as photographs and entries from diaries.*<sup>5</sup>

#### AFTER WATCHING

1. What personal belief system, qualities and experience from his former career positions did Ray bring with him that qualified him for the difficult job of Commissioner of Police in Queensland?
  - Discuss the role of Ray Whitrod as the outsider brought in to sort out an ingrained problem.
  - Discuss the positive and negative aspects of the Australian tradition of mateship.
2. Despite implementing numerous strategies to break the code of loyalty amongst Queensland police, Ray and his team came against strong resistance in almost every direction.
  - Discuss the role of Ray Whitrod as the outsider brought in to sort out an ingrained problem.
  - Discuss the positive and negative aspects of the Australian tradition of mateship.
3. At the start of the interview Ray says that he thinks Queenslanders are apathetic about political matters.
  - What factors might have contributed to his perception?
  - Thinking about the State in which you live, do you agree with his point of view?
  - To what extent do you think that people in Australia are apathetic about politics in general? Identify the key issues. Select a particular audience and design a poster or write an advertisement (for any medium) that informs your audience about the importance and relevance of political matters and encourages them to actively participate.
4. Since retirement Ray has continued his social and legal reform work.
  - Find out about the Victims of Crime Service (VOCS) that was set up by Whitrod in Adelaide in 1979 and now operates throughout Australia.
  - What are the basic principles of

the Victims of Crime Rights Bill that Ray set up through the United Nations? In what ways is this UN declaration important?

- Find out about recent legal reforms regarding victims of crime in your state or territory.
  - Discuss the 'new' concept of Restorative Justice. What is its focus and primary assumptions? Much of the original ideas of Restorative Justice are based upon community justice processes practised by indigenous communities worldwide.
  - Watch the documentary *Breaking Bows and Arrows*, the story of how a broken community on Bougainville is turning to tradition to heal the rifts caused by a decade of armed conflict.
  - Investigate the role of "sentencing circles" in indigenous cultures.
  - Find out about aspects of Australian Aboriginal Law, New Zealand Maori justice or the role of apology in Japanese culture. Present your findings to the class.
  - Are there any groups in your area that advocate on behalf of victims of crime?
5. What do you believe that Ray Whitrod achieved during his career?
  6. What personal resources did he fall back on during times of adversity?

#### MEDIA STUDIES

*History...is an inquiry which tries to narrate, reconstruct and interpret past human experiences.*<sup>6</sup>

Biography told through the method of oral history has certain narrative elements, revealing the motivation of characters and what they do with opportunity and time.

Certain stylistic elements are used by the filmmaker to enhance the narrative. They are: composition, framing, spatial relations, camera movement, lighting, editing techniques, narration, sound effects, music, archival photographs and film or tape.

- What role does the interviewer/narrator play in this program?
- What are the challenges of using narration in this manner?
- How has music been used?

- Discuss the use of archival stills and footage.

A biography also reveals a sequence of events and should achieve narrative unity.

- Discuss the style and pace of the editing and whether it distracted from or enhanced the narrative unity.
- Is closure achieved at the end of the narrative?
- Are issues resolved?
- Are questions answered?
- Were you drawn into the story?
- Which part of the story resonated with you?

## FURTHER READING

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Judy Mackinolty (ed), *The Wasted years? Australia's Great Depression*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

Marta Rado (series ed), *Life in the Great Depression*, Heinemann Educational Australia, Richmond, 1985.

### POLICING AND POWER

Phil Dickie, *The Road to Fitzgerald*, University of Queensland Press, 1988.

Mark Finnane, *Police and Government: histories of policing in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

Peter Nils Grabosky, *Wayward Governance: illegality and its control in the public sector*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, c1989.

Sandra McKillop and Julia Vernon (eds), *The police and the community in the 1990s: proceedings of a conference held 23-25 October 1990*, Australian Institute of Criminology, c1991.

Scott Prasser, Rae Wear and John Nethercote (eds), *Corruption and reform: the Fitzgerald vision*, University of Queensland Press, 1990.

Queensland Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct, *Report of a commission of inquiry pursuant to*

*orders in council*, Government Printer, Queensland, 1989.

Queensland Council for Civil Liberties, Submission to committee on police powers, Brisbane, 1977.

*Police In Our Society*, Butterworths, 1988.

*Policing in Australia: historical perspectives*, New South Wales University Press, c1987.

*Keeping the peace: police accountability and oversight*, University of Canberra and the Royal Institute of Public Administration Australia, Canberra, 1994.

Joh's Jury [videorecording]. ABC Television Drama co-production with Southern Star Sullivan Productions, Sydney, 1993.

Moonlight State (*Four Corners*) [videorecording]. ABC Television, Reporter: Chris Masters.

### VICTIMS OF CRIME LAW REFORM

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rpp/1-20/rpp19.html>  
Bree Cook, Fiona David and Anna Grant, *Victims' Needs, Victims' Rights: Policies and Programs for Victims of Crime in Australia*, AIC Research and Public Policy Series No 19, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1999.

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/40/a40r034.htm> Centre for Human Rights, *Declaration of basic principles of justice for victims of crime and abuse of power*, UN Document Series Symbol: ST/HR/, United Nations.

[www.restorativejustice.org](http://www.restorativejustice.org) Restorative Justice Online: International Centre for Justice and Reconciliation

Liz Thompson (director), *Breaking Bows and Arrows* [videorecording], A Tiger Eye and Firelight Film Production, 2001. (Program and study guide available from Film Australia)

[www.peacemakers.ca](http://www.peacemakers.ca) The Peacemakers Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to research, education and consultation on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

[www.voc.sa.gov.au](http://www.voc.sa.gov.au) Victims of Crime Co-ordinator, Attorney General's Department, Government of South Australia

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> ASIO web site: <http://www.asio.gov.au/about/content/what.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Reiner, R, (1995), "Policing and the Police", in Macgurie, M, Morgan, R and Reiner, R, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.law.ecel.uwa.edu.au/crc/POLICE1.DOC>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~wtmp/misc/cop.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Anderson and Paul Ashton, *Focus on Australian History*, MacMillan Education Australia, 1994.
- <sup>6</sup> Mark Anderson and Paul Ashton, *Focus on Australian History*, MacMillan Education Australia, 1994, P. 2.

**Australian Biography: Ray Whitrod**  
A Film Australia National Interest Program  
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**Executive Producer:** Mark Hamlyn  
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