

John Douglas Kerr – esteemed historian, statistician and writer – was a dedicated Councillor and Honorary Librarian of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland and a founder and Honorary Treasurer of the Professional Historians' Association (Queensland).

Born in Brisbane on 8 August 1942, John Kerr was educated at Camberwell in Melbourne and subsequently in Mackay where his father was Director of the Sugar Research Institute. At the age of 16 he combined his passion for documentation and his love of cycling in the compilation of a Street Directory of Mackay. He was a brilliant student, winning a coveted Open Scholarship to the University of Queensland from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in mathematical statistics. Over the ensuing 30 years he worked as a statistician in the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Queensland Department of Forestry and the CSIRO. He worked at the forefront of experimental design in the analysis of and control of animal diseases, insect pests and weeds. He was a member of the team which won a UNESCO World Prize for Discovery in the context of his work on the eradication of *Salvinia*; a weed which infested dams and waterways in Australia.

As a professional historian John Kerr's contributions were characterised by his total professionalism and research integrity, his enormous productivity and the selfless help he gave to both professional historians and amateur enthusiasts alike. For 40 years he advanced knowledge concerning the history of Australian railways publishing extensively in the Australian Railway Society's *Bulletin*, and wrote *Triumph of narrow gauge: A history of Queensland railways*, first published in 1990 with a second edition completed in 1998. In 1959 he began the compilation of an unprecedented historical database on Queensland railways, a resource which he regularly updated and re-supplied to Australian libraries from 1966 until his death. He was the Australian authority on the history of the sugar industry and his database will continue to be used by local historians, agriculturalists and policy makers for generations to come.

In Queensland John Kerr pioneered the field of commissioned public histories written by professional historians. His first major work, *Northern outpost: Mossman Central Mill* was published in 1979; to be followed by twenty other books including *Pioneer pageant: Pioneer Shire*; *Mount Morgan: Gold, copper and oil*; *Sugar at Maryborough: 120 years of challenge*; *Southern sugar saga: Sugar industry in the Bundaberg District*; *Going in deep: History of the Gladstone Port Authority*; *A crystal century: History of Proserpine's sugar mill, farms and people*; and *Black snow and liquid gold: History of Burdekin Shire*. He was an authority on the interpretation of the heritage significance of both the natural and built environment and he completed major consultancies for such bodies as the Environmental Protection Agency and other Queensland Government agencies.

John Kerr worked selflessly for the Australian history community. In particular, he served the Royal Historical Society of Queensland for more than three decades. Elected a Member in 1968, he was a Councillor almost continuously from 1974 until his death; Honorary Librarian for many years and for 15 years the Editor of the Society's *Journal*. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland in 1983 and for his contributions to Australian history he was elected a Fellow of the Federation of Historical Societies.