



RUTH PARK

Writer

Ruth Park's beloved Muddle-Headed Wombat began life as a character in a radio serial broadcast on *The Argonauts*, the hugely popular children's club which the ABC revived in 1941. The imaginative power of the Wombat and his inseparable friends, Mouse and Tabby Cat, and of Park's other children's books, including the multi-award winning *Playing Beatie Bow*, stimulated Australian children's imaginations to look at their own world in a different way. Her unpretentious novels and journalism had the same effect. Though her output was prolific over six decades, it was her first book, *The Harp in the South*, with its realistic presentation of slum life in Sydney's Surry Hills, which had the most influence. "I remember the furore ... from adults in hushed, shocked, gleeful voices talking about the scandal of this novel of the slums," recalled writer Marion Halligan, who was six in 1946 when *The Harp* won *The Sydney Morning Herald* competition. Angus & Robertson published it grudgingly and *The Bulletin's* Red Page cast doubt on its literary quality. But readers loved it. It was widely translated and never out of print. And though Park, a compulsive storyteller, never intended it to have a crusading function, the book became an effective weapon in the hands of social reformers.

WILLIAM HUDSON

Dam builder

The New Zealand-born civil engineer appointed in 1949 by Prime Minister Ben Chifley to build the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme had a reputation for building dams on time and at fixed prices, and for being "a bit of a slave driver". William Hudson's brief was to harness the snow melt from the Australian Alps, diverting it westwards through long trans-mountain tunnels to irrigate the arid interior for food production. In its fall to the plains, the water would generate power for the booming manufacturing sector. It took 25 years for the Snowy's legendary



workforce to complete 16 dams, seven power stations, 80km of aqueducts and 15km of tunnels. Over the course of the project, 100,000 workers were recruited from 32 countries - a global village years before Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase. "You won't be Balts or Slavs ... you will be men of the Snowy," Hudson exhorted his workers. Living conditions were harsh, comparable to the Russian Front, some said. But Hudson introduced revolutionary work practices to maintain momentum including private arbitration to deal with disputes, the wearing of safety belts and drink-driving penalties - and enduring pride in a national asset.

AL GRASSBY

Federal politician

Al Grassby, immigration minister in Gough Whitlam's Labor government, put ethnic affairs and multiculturalism on the political agenda in 1973 with a manifesto for a new sort of Australia. His paper, *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, challenged the notion that there was a single Australian way of life and argued that Australia was a mosaic of cultures. It proposed that migrant cultures and languages should be preserved, not repressed in the process of assimilation. The word multicultural was borrowed from the Canadians, but this appears to be the first time it was used in Australia. In a plea from the heart, Grassby, himself of Irish and Spanish heritage, asked: "Where is the Maltese process worker, the Finnish carpenter, the Italian concrete layer, the Yugoslav miner - or dare I say it - the Indian scientist? Where do these people belong, in all honesty, if not in today's composite Australian image?" By 1977, the word was in common usage and the Fraser government asked Melbourne lawyer Frank Galbally to look into migrant settlement. The following year, Galbally recommended that \$50m be spent over the next three years on migrant welfare services. Multicultural policy was supported by both sides of politics for nearly 20 years until the Howard government began dismantling it in favour of promoting Australian values.

