

## Dallas, Kenneth McKenzie (Ken) (1902–1988)

by [Michael Roe](#)

Kenneth McKenzie (Ken) Dallas (1902-1988), historian, was born on 11 September 1902 at Detention River, west of Wynyard, Tasmania, son of Robert Dallas, a Tasmanian-born farmer, and his wife Margaret Jane, née Robinson, formerly a schoolteacher from Victoria. Brought up on a farm at Rocky Cape, Ken advanced through the local school to Launceston State High School (1916-19). Entering the State education service, he spent 1921 in Hobart at the University of Tasmania and Philip Smith Training College. His chief mentor then was [John Johnson](#) (and later [James Brigden](#)); he became a socialist about this time. He taught in rural areas, mainly at South Riana's one-teacher school, and studied externally for a commerce degree at the university (B.Com., 1928), achieving outstanding results. In 1925-30 he taught at Launceston High, friendship there with [Archibald Meston](#) stimulating his interest in Tasmanian (notably Aboriginal) history.

In 1930 Dallas became tutor at Devonport for the Workers' Educational Association, which was then linked with the university. On 31 January 1931 at St George's Church of England, Burnie, he married Margaret Cecilia Hogarth, a schoolteacher. That year he worked with the WEA at Newcastle, New South Wales. In March 1932 he was appointed as Pitt Cobbett lecturer in the commerce faculty in Hobart, a position that entailed both university duties and directorship of the WEA. Dallas embodied the ideal WEA type: while of an intellectual cast, he focused on the action of social and economic forces. His discourse was always positive and informed, often enthralling, sometimes overbearing. Powerful in body as in mind, he was a rower and yachtsman, with compelling presence. He deliberately followed [Lyndhurst Giblin](#) in simplicity of dress and style.

Although sensitive to the radicalism of Depression-time Newcastle, Dallas moved sharply to the left only with the burgeoning of fascism. He was commissioned in the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve on 1 January 1941, before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. Sent to Britain for service in landing ships of the Royal Navy, he expected 'a rendezvous with death'. He rose to lieutenant, saw action in the Mediterranean, took part in the first wave of the assault against Normandy on D-Day (6 June 1944) and won his superiors' approbation. His appointment terminated on 19 March 1945 in Hobart.

Back at the university, Dallas taught many socially conscious undergraduates. He formed friendships with, among others, Polish migrants and Asian students. Cultural interests included the Australasian Book Society and European films. He was divorced in 1945, and on 11 June 1948 at the registrar-general's office, Hobart, married Ina Freund, a photographer. In 1951 he was promoted to senior lecturer. Committed to the WEA, he felt bitter distress as it lost centrality in Tasmania's adult education. He supported the university's Labor Club and the Australian Peace Council, but never joined the Communist Party of Australia. In 1954, on the advice of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, the government refused him a passport. An ASIO memo reported that Prime Minister [\(Sir\) Robert Menzies](#) 'had a good opinion of Dallas', and next year the ban was reversed, allowing him to take up a Rockefeller fellowship for a year's study leave in Britain.

Dallas's contempt for Professor [Sydney Sparkes Orr](#) separated him from colleagues who challenged Orr's dismissal in 1956, and he became isolated in an ever more specialised faculty. By contrast, his retirement in 1967 saw rare flowering. A 'Dallas' issue (September 1968) of the *Papers and Proceedings* of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association comprised three articles: a study of the 'tyranny of distance' concept, Dallas counter-arguing that 'remoteness' offered bounty and opportunity; 'Slavery in Australia—Convicts, Emigrants, Aborigines'; and 'Commercial Influences on the First Settlements of Australia'. This last subject also formed the basis of a monograph, *Trading Posts or Penal Colonies* (1969). Questions raised by Dallas were to provoke much scholarship, some more detailed than his, but never more probing. *Horse Power* (1968) celebrated the economic importance of horses. Vividly evoking childhood on the family farm, this essay merits recognition as an Australian classic. *Water Power—Past and Future* (1970), prefigured 'slow-growth' themes in subsequent writing about British industrialisation: old-style water-power remained significant far into the nineteenth century, he argued, and then hydroelectricity intensified that story.

Divorced in 1967, on 29 January 1971 at the Scots Presbyterian Church, Hobart, Dallas married Janet Mary Tarbath, née Lorimer, a schoolteacher. He died on 6 August 1988 at New Town and was cremated. His wife, the son of his first marriage and two daughters and a son of his second marriage, survived him.