

Obituary

John Bruce Piggott, CBE
22 August 1913 - 30 May 2000

Bruce Piggott, who died in Hobart on 30 May, was a leading member of the Australian legal profession. First admitted to practice in 1935, he rose to be President of the Law Council of Australia, serving in that office between 1961 and 1964. His career was marked by a number of firsts. He was an innovator and questioner of received wisdom and he stayed that way until the end of his long life.

Between 1988 and 1990 Bruce Piggott served as the Chief Judge and Chairman of the Nuclear Claims Tribunal in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. His novel function there was to determine the principles and award compensation for the victims of the atomic tests on the Bikini and Enewetak Atolls. This was a high point in a career that had many peaks and witnessed his growth from a solicitor in Hobart to a significant figure in international legal circles.

Born in 1913, Bruce Piggott was educated at the Hutchins School in Hobart and the University of Tasmania. It was after the Second World War that he started to take an interest in professional organisations. He served as President of the United Nations Association in Tasmania between 1945 and 1962. He was elected President of the Law Society of Tasmania between 1960 and 1962, later returning for another term at the end of that decade. It was during his period as President of the Law Council that Australia became associated with the foundation of Lawasia, a body of lawyers from all parts of Asia and the Western Pacific.

Bruce Piggott's outward looking, internationalist approach to legal practice was shown in the many leading roles he played. Between 1961 and 1964 he was Vice-President of the International Bar Association. Somehow he found the time to establish the leading law firm of Piggott, Wood and Baker in Hobart, to take part in a number of commercial ven-

tures important for Tasmania and to lead the National Theatre and Fine Arts Society of Tasmania, of which he was the first President.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Bruce Piggott served as Chairman of the Tasmanian Law Reform Commission. He tackled the challenge with great energy and was foremost in the efforts to secure cooperation between law reform bodies in all parts of Australia and beyond.

Bruce Piggott was a study in contrasts. He was a man almost Rumpollian in his ability and inclination to lapse into Shakespeare or the classical poets. But he also knew leading Australian poets and specially loved the works of Kath Walker (Oogeroo of the Nunuccal). Somehow he managed to throw off the blinkers of parochialism and to engage himself in the problems of the disadvantaged in Australia and countries far distant. He was a champion of women's rights and the reform of family law, rape law and for the removal of legal disadvantages and discrimination against women. It is an intriguing question as to how this happened. But it did. Bruce Piggott was always ahead of his time. The last cause that he embraced was republicanism. His view was always that society and the law should question orthodoxy and be ready to change, even in radical ways, when change was shown to be for the better.

The memorial service in St David's Cathedral, Hobart, on 3 June 2000 was attended by leaders of the legal profession and the general community. Bruce Piggott is survived by his second wife Audrey, their two sons and daughter, as well as four daughters and two sons of his previous marriage, 27 grandchildren, 21 great grandchildren and many admirers.

— By Michael Kirby.