



Queensland Law Society Annual Symposium
Friday 30 March 2012, 9am
Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice

I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak this morning from this rostrum. The opportunity to address more than 800 Queensland practitioners gathered together is to be treasured.

Today we acknowledge the 50th anniversary of this significant symposium. We come to that fresh from last August's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Supreme Court. This year also will be momentous in the history of both the Supreme Court and the District Court, with our move to the new metropolitan courthouse. I will speak briefly this morning about each of those matters, and it is appropriate that I begin by expressing gratitude for the profession's support of the court's 150th anniversary last year.

The ceremonial sitting in the Banco Court on 5 August was very well attended, as was the gala dinner at the Queensland Art Gallery the following evening. I trust those of you who may have been able to attend the ceremonial sitting found it a memorable experience. It was significant not only for the anniversary, but also for the circumstance that for the first time in my living memory, every judge of the court, all 26 of us, sat together on the bench in the Banco Court – the court truly sat en banc. Also, Her Excellency the Governor was present, adding lustre to the occasion, and Her Excellency also attended the sesquicentenary gala dinner the following night, as did the Deputy Premier and Attorney-General, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, and among 250 other guests, the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia and five other Australian Chief Justices, from South Australia, the ACT, Victoria, the Federal Court and the Family Court. We were grateful for the acknowledgement accorded the court.



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The vibrancy of those events was palpable. The sesquicentenary publication edited by Justice Martin constitutes an excellent record of both occasions, and of the constitution of the court since its inauguration in 1861.

I spoke on those occasions about the timelessness of the mission of the courts, and the public's reassurance founded in the conscientious way in which that mission is discharged. But let us remember that the mission is jointly discharged: the courts depend on the competence and ethical commitment of those who appear in the courtroom, and those who complete non-contentious work at the office or chambers. It is a matter of great satisfaction and assurance for the Judges that we are so well served by a practising profession exhibiting those qualities.

I acknowledge with gratitude the Society's recent presentation to the court of what we are calling "The Supreme Court Sesquicentenary Book", an exquisitely made leather-bound parchment book including, in calligraphic style, the names and brief biographical details of all Judges who have served on the court in its 150 year history – 111 of them, with provision to cover further appointments over the next 50 years or so. The book is on permanent public display. It is a tangible symbol of the mutual respect characterizing the court and the solicitors of this State.

And so we move as a united profession into another memorable year. This one will see the Supreme and District Courts move to 415 George Street. The new courthouse is a simply stunning building, which for its utility, will serve the people of Queensland well, and even surpassing that, it will inspire, is already inspiring. The first question people generally ask me these days is when will our new courthouse be opened, meaning "our" in the sense of "the people's".

Those who speak to me are full of commendation for what they are seeing. The building is already a source of wonder and inspiration. Completed, it will present as a courthouse which will serve, interest and inspire. It will inspire in reminding the citizenry of the



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stipulation which lies at the base of civil society, which is the rule of law, and it will do that in a most interesting way.

This courthouse covers 60,000 square metres of floor space, spread over 19 levels, including 39 established courtrooms. Fourteen of those will be capable of eTrials, 7 civil and 7 criminal. All of the courtrooms will accommodate the electronic display of evidence, and 17 will allow fully for the reception of evidence by video link – presently we have only 9 courtrooms with that capacity. Twenty-two courtrooms will have full teleconferencing capacity : presently only 7. There will be video link courtrooms to the cells, and interview rooms will have videoconferencing facilities – allowing for conferences with prisoners at correctional centres, for example. Jury rooms, all 24 of them, will at last have DVD/VCR installations. The building will include 4 remote evidence and vulnerable witness suites, and an entire floor for the Library. There will be capacity for translation of evidence by an interpreter remotely located : useful to meet a current phenomenon where we may have difficulty finding, locally, someone fluent in both English and some exotic dialects spoken, for example, by allegedly illegal entrants. The ground floor will include the Sir Harry Gibbs Legal Heritage Centre showcasing, with the aid of state-of-the-art technology, the history of the profession and the courts.

Litigants and practitioners will I am confident find this courthouse a most pleasant and convenient place in which to work. From the inception of the project, the maximum infusion of natural light has been a firm stipulation, and that has been achieved. There is even some influx of natural light into the cells, implementing a recommendation of the “Deaths in Custody” report. Needless to say, it is an environmentally friendly building, with so-called water harvesting and recycling, an innovative air-conditioning system and solar cells for energy needs. There is even capacity for a flow of natural light into part of the cells area. The artwork, inside and out, will be brilliant, some may say “arresting”. The people will acquire a new, large, ambient grassed plaza, comparable in area to Post Office Square and Queens Park.



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This will be the most significant new public building in the CBD since the construction of the Executive Building. The building has risen with considerable speed, bearing in mind its complexity, especially with the need for separation of jurors, prisoners, the public and the judges. The “turning of the sod” ceremony took place on 6 October 2008, less than four years ago.

We are working towards a move into this new building during the Winter vacation in July, with the formal opening by the Governor on the morning of Friday 3 August, followed by a day free of court sittings so that the public may savour the treasures of their new major public building.

I am hoping that occasion will also see the release of a high-quality publication on the history of the Supreme Court authored by Mr John McKenna SC. It will feature photographically many of the atmospheric courthouses of the State, with a focus on the Supreme Court.

The Council of Chief Justices of Australia and New Zealand has agreed to meet in the new courthouse on the day before the opening, so I am hoping that all Australian and New Zealand Chief Justices will remain for the opening on the Friday.

Then a seminar open to the profession and the public will take place on Saturday 4 August, to be addressed by a stellar array of international and Australian speakers, including the Chief Justices of New Zealand, Hong Kong and Australia, Justice Kiefel, the Master of the Rolls and Lady Justice Hallett from the UK, the Chief Justices of the Federal Court, Victoria and Western Australia, and the new Dean of the UQ Law School Professor Carney. Topics will include, from Lord Neuberger, the future of the common law; from Chief Justice French, the courts and parliament; from Chief Justice Elias, the courts and the executive; from Chief Justice Ma, the practitioner’s duty to the court; and from Lady Justice Hallett, judicial education. I encourage you to attend this seminar, to be held in the Banco Court of the new courthouse.



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Before that, on 30 May in our present Banco Court, former Chief Justice Murray Gleeson will deliver the second Supreme Court Oration on aspects of *Donoghue v Stevenson*, this year celebrating its 80th anniversary.

As mentioned before, over the last 150 years, the significance of the Supreme Court has been assured by the independent support of the practising profession. The new metropolitan courthouse will signify the vibrancy of our profession in all its branches. Importantly, that courthouse has been the result of substantial consultation between the Judges and the professional associations.

This year the Queensland Law Society reaches its 84th anniversary. It continues to perform a vital role in advancing the interests of Queensland solicitors and thereby the public interest. With current patterns, the next three to four years will see the numbers of practitioners holding practising certificates exceed 10,000, which is a reflection of the community's substantial need for legal services. As Chief Justice, I am especially grateful to note the close collaboration between the Society and the Bar Association, a reflection of what I do assess as the unity of our profession.

I am also impressed by the Society's genuine commitment to practitioners throughout the State, not just those in the south-east corner. In the Symposium context, the Society extends a lot of support for the annual Central and North Queensland Law Association conferences – which my wife and I are privileged to attend, and district conferences. This is a commendable commitment.

The Society discharges an instrumental role in a number of areas, among the most important facilitating continual professional development, encouraging high efficiency especially with specialist accreditation, militating the highest standards of ethical commitment, and contributing to informed public debate on matters legal. This symposium is the apogee of the first of those considerations. With this year's 50th anniversary, the Vincents' Annual Symposium warrants particular acknowledgement.



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Over the last half century, the symposium has stood at the vanguard of continuing professional development for Queensland lawyers.

The early 1960's saw limited, rather experimental seminars devoted to specific pieces of legislation. How the symposium has grown, to the point where 50 years on it should probably be regarded as the most substantial CPD event of the legal calendar year in this State, with as mentioned, more than 800 delegates this year flooding into one of the State's largest convention centres.

I am amazed to be able to say that I have been associated with the symposium for almost 40 of those 50 years. I was fortunate to score speaker berths from my early days at the bar. The lure was not confined to a free night's accommodation: in addition, one was immersed in a large contingent of potential briefers, although of course I never exploited that situation! The challenge was to impress through the quality of one's paper and responses to the following questions.

Those were the days of the symposiums at the Chevron Hotel at Surfers Paradise, where much legal education was imparted at the Pink Elephant Bar. Lest that be thought to smack of sanctimony, I do acknowledge that for the ancient Greeks, a "symposium" was indeed a most convivial occasion, or as the Oxford Dictionary bluntly terms it, a "drinking party".

I recall a rather experimental visit by the symposium to Toowoomba in the early 1980's, where we were reminded how stressful professional life can be.

In 1985 things became a tad less serious, with impromptu entertainment on St Patrick's Day including Irish songs performed by Justice Des Derrington and past Society President Gerry Murphy and pianoforte accompaniment by Elizabeth Nosworthy on a Steinway – a real "symposium".



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My first symposium as Chief Justice was in 1998: the focus of that symposium was “Law in the new millennium”, as we were all beginning to fear the dreaded “Y2K bug”: what a furphy that turned out to be.

By this stage the scale of the symposium had dramatically expanded, with the compulsory CPD scheme in place. Large attendances were assured, and the Society and the organizing committees willingly and productively assumed the burden of ensuring particularly high quality programmes. And high profile speakers were enlisted.

The 2001 keynote address was delivered by former High Court Justice Michael Kirby, arguing, in his characteristically compelling way, for public debate on the human genome project. Two years later a popular keynote address was delivered by Mr Geoffrey Robertson QC on professional ethics, responsibilities and risk management. Mr Robertson has been invited back: no doubt his address tomorrow morning will be popular and well attended. I am to be followed this morning by Mr Bernard Salt. Those of you who follow his columns on Thursday and Saturday in “The Australian” will be thinking: stop Chief Justice, let us hear from Mr Salt.

But before I conclude this brief review, I must mention the 2005 symposium, for it was a most remarkable undertaking: it combined so many events – the 19th Lawasia Biennial Conference, the Conference of Chief Justices of Asia and the Pacific, a meeting of Australia’s Attorneys-General, and the Law Council of Australia’s Annual Legal Convention.

There has been great variety in approach and offerings. But throughout that half century, the Queensland Law Society has shown determination to bring the profession together for two days of inspiring sessions catering to a great variety of needs, no matter what the practice area, specialty or other field of particular interest. We may with confidence anticipate the next 50 years of continuing professional development for practitioners in this State.



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I wish you all a most interesting and productive two days.

Then on Sunday I hope you will join me in more relaxed mode at the BGS Northgate Playing Fields, with the toss which I hope to accomplish at 9.15am. There you see contention move from the courtroom to the cricket pitch, with barristers and solicitors competing in the match of the year. To date, the solicitors have won twice as many matches as have been won by the barristers, so there is certainly, on one hand, a reputation to uphold, and perhaps on the other, a score to settle. It is sure to play to one of our profession's greatest strengths – embracing a challenge and competing to win – but also collegiality at the end of the contest. I look forward to seeing many of you as the respective branches of the practising profession vie for supremacy and thence the Chief Justice's Cup – which has been refurbished for the occasion!

I have expressed thanks for your continued support of the courts, and respect for the proficiency and ethical commitment you demonstrate. It remains for me to wish you well as you embark on another year, which I hope will prove most fulfilling and successful.