

KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL

Gordon Library

NATIONAL TRUST HERITAGE FESTIVAL, 2017

**CHARLES BEAN, LIFE AND WORK EXHIBITION
Launch (20 April 2017)**

HAVING A VOICE : CEW BEAN AS A “SOCIAL MISSIONARY”

by

JUSTICE GEOFF LINDSAY

(Supreme Court of NSW)



CEW Bean

- 1 As Anzac Day approaches, Australians find themselves once again in a time open to reflection on the life, work and times of CEW Bean. He is routinely brought to mind each year in the lead up to Anzac Day (grounded in the events of 25 April 1915 at Gallipoli) and Remembrance Day (the anniversary of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918), each Day a concrete illustration of the nature and extent of the influence of World War I (1914-1918) on the Australian imagination.

- 2 CEW Bean is best remembered, by those Australians who do remember, as Australia's Official War Correspondent in World War I; Editor of Australia's *Official History* of that war; and one of the founders of the Australian War Memorial. He is often associated with, if not deemed an originator of, the Australian foundation myth of "mateship".
- 3 Bean's life experience and writings cast light on Australians in war. Charles Bean is an indispensable authority in the study of Australian military history. The sheer volume of his writing comes close to ensuring that; but a decisive consideration, more than volume, is that Bean was "there" with frontline soldiers, in real time, visiting every battlefield of World War I, recording events contemporaneously or preserving evidence of actual participants, and endeavouring to understand everything by placing all available information in an analytical framework, mindful of moral and social dimensions.
- 4 Conscious of grand strategies and broad themes, his natural predisposition was to convey meaning through personal stories. He was respected by his contemporaries, and he continues to be respected, because of his quiet, consistent displays of courage (physical and moral); his dedication to Truth as he saw it; and his devotion to public service.
- 5 It is fit and proper that we remember CEW Bean in this context. However, we sell him short, and deprive ourselves of important insights, if we limit our vision of Charles Bean to the military sphere.
- 6 CEW Bean was, amongst other things, by nature and nurture, an incurable archivist. Recognising, but putting to one side, his work in establishment of the Australian War Memorial *and* the National Archives, his legacy includes a large archive of personal papers (housed in the Australian War Memorial) which provide a resource for the study of Australian society, not limited to military affairs, during the course of his long life.

- 7 Bean's latest biographer, Peter Rees (*Bearing Witness*, Sydney, 2015) describes the man as a "social missionary" because of the nature and breadth of Bean's interest in social improvement, with core concerns in education, health, town planning and the environment. An illustration of those concerns is his establishment of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement of NSW.
- 8 A consistent theme in Bean's thinking is his recognition of a need for evidence-based problem solving, directed to the common good, with effective planning of programmes for better systems of education, town planning and healthier lifestyles for everyone.
- 9 The full significance of this perspective of Australia's iconic war correspondent cannot be appreciated unless we take time to know the man. Brief though it is, this paper invites Australians to invest time in that task. It is a task that can pay dividends in understanding of national heritage.
- 10 Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean was born, at home, at All Saints' College, Bathurst, on 18 November 1879. He died, at Concord Repatriation Hospital, on 30 August 1968.
- 11 Conscious of social privileges he enjoyed, and generally comfortable in any company, he had a strong egalitarian side, tempered by a respect for merit as he perceived it. He was not indifferent to honours, but he was selective in his acceptance of them. More than once he declined an offer of a knighthood, though he accepted doctorates from the University of Melbourne (1931) and the Australian National University (1959) awarded in recognition of his work, and he allowed himself to be called "Dr Bean". He was content to spend his last years of illness (1963-1968), and to die, in Concord Repat., with other survivors of war.

- 12 When, in December 1940, he was offered a knighthood, he responded to Government House in the following terms:

“I deeply appreciate the action of His Excellency [the Governor General] and the Government in recommending me for a knighthood, but I have for many years held that in Australia the interest of the nation would best be served by the elimination of social distinctions, as far as is reasonably possible. Though I have the greatest admiration for many titled men and women and for their work and influence, it seems to me that in practice, despite certain advantages, the system encourages false values among our people, and that our generation needs above everything to see and aim at true values. For this reason, and this only, I have begged to decline this reward, by the kind offer of which I am deeply gratified”.

- 13 Bean had a strong moral compass, grounded in an equally strong family tradition. It coloured everything he saw, everything he did.

- 14 Something of the man can be gleaned from his name.

- 15 He was named “Charles” after his maternal grandfather, Charles Butler (1820-1909), a prominent Hobart solicitor. He was named “Edwin” after his father, Edwin Bean (1851-1922), a Headmaster of Independent schools, who took holy orders in the Church of England (ordained Deacon, 1897; ordained Priest, 1898) in aid of his position as a Headmaster. He was named “Woodrow” after a great uncle by marriage, uncle Henry Woodrow (1823-1876), whose claim to fame, within the Bean family, was that an episode in the 19th century novel, *Tom Brown’s School Days*, was based on a real incident taken from his life: As told in Part 2, chapter 1, Woodrow (personified in the hero of the novel, Tom Brown) stood up for a little boy (George Arthur) bullied for saying bedtime prayers at Rugby School.

- 16 Directly or indirectly, references to “Rugby School” (an English public school; that is to say, an “independent private school” in Australian parlance) recur in the story of CEW Bean.

- 17 The author of *Tom Brown's School Days* (first published in 1857), Tom Hughes (1822-1896), was a contemporary of Henry Woodrow at Rugby School. A Christian socialist, he was called to the English Bar in 1847, he took silk in 1869, and he became a County Court judge in 1882.
- 18 In real life, Woodrow was one of six boys who took supper with the famous headmaster of Rugby School, Dr Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), on the evening before Dr Arnold's death. He became an education administrator in colonial India, an honourable career worthy of notice within the Bean family.
- 19 Edwin Bean married Lucy Madeline Butler (1852-1942) in 1877 in Hobart. Of the four children of their marriage, the first (their only daughter) died in infancy. Charles was the eldest of their three sons. He was followed by John Willoughby Butler ("Jack" or "Jock") in 1881, and by Montague Butler ("Monty" or "Tig") in 1884. They were a close-knit family.
- 20 On both sides of that family there was a strong, active commitment to education, informed by an admiration for Dr Arnold, the Headmaster who rejuvenated Rugby in the decade before his death.
- 21 Bean's career was an extension of that of his father. Edwin was born in Bombay, India, to a father who was Surgeon-Major of the East India Company's Army. Edwin was educated in England: at Somerset College, Bath; Clifton College, Bristol; and Trinity College, Oxford. He tried, but in a competitive examination failed, to enter the Indian Civil Service. His first job was as a private tutor in Hobart in 1874. He was subsequently a teacher at Geelong Grammar School, Victoria (1874-1875), and Sydney Grammar School, NSW (1875-1876). With the support of the headmaster of Sydney Grammar, AB Weigall (1840-1912), he became Headmaster of All Saints College, Bathurst (1877-1890). After a breakdown in 1889, he took his young family to England where he became (between 1891-1913) Headmaster of Sir Anthony Browne's School (known as Brentwood School), Essex. Upon his retirement, he returned to Tasmania and, in retirement, taught part-time at Hutchins School, in Hobart.

- 22 Lucy Bean (nee Butler) was entirely supportive of her husband and his world view. A good illustration of this, expressed in terms of her own values, is found in a diary note she wrote to Charles, when he was but a boy, extracted in Peter Rees' *Bearing Witness* (at page xv):

“Charlie dear, be truthful, and upright, and morally brave, I should like you to be brave in every way, but I care far more for moral bravery than for any other....

I do not want to see you a rich man, or a man holding a leading position, so much as to see you a good, charitable man. You may be all, and I shall be happy if I live to see you all, but the riches and position come after... you can be happy without them, but you cannot be happy unless you are good.

Be kind and unselfish. You Charlie my eldest, know the little talks we have had together about this”.

- 23 Hutchins School was long associated with the Butler family, and members of the family of Dr Arnold. Its first headmaster Reverend JR Buckland (1819-1874), was a nephew of Dr Arnold.
- 24 The influence of Thomas Arnold was also felt in Tasmania through his son, another Thomas Arnold (1823-1900), Tasmania's first Inspector of Schools (1850-1856).
- 25 The strength of “The Arnold Tradition”, as Charles Bean there labelled it, is manifest in Bean's book, *Here, My Son: An account of the independent and other corporate boys' schools of Australia* (Sydney, 1950).
- 26 What was The Arnold Tradition”? Drawing on *Here, My Son*, we can fairly take it to have been a form of Christian humanism of a democratic (albeit patrician) kind, emphasising individual self-worth and qualities associated with “good character” : trust and reliability, honesty, openness, self-discipline, self-reliance, independent thought and action, friendship, and concern for the common good over selfish or sectional interests.

- 27 Bean associated that Tradition with Dr Arnold. He absorbed it through both branches of his family. It was an education model admired in each of the schools with which his father, Edwin was associated: principally, Sydney Grammar; All Saints College; Brentwood; and Clifton College.
- 28 The apple did not fall far from the tree. Charles was immensely proud of his father and, one might readily imagine, he endeavoured, according to his own lights, to emulate the older man, although he disclaimed teaching as a personal vocation. Both men were imbued with a profound respect for ancient, classical times. Charles' leanings towards classical Greek philosophy, in particular, influenced his vision of the Australian War Memorial as a secular shrine. One example of Charles' filial admiration for "pater" is his pride in the school magazines Edwin promoted as a teacher, quite possibly models for some of Charles' own publications, including *The Anzac Book* (London, 1916).
- 29 Charles actively fostered a personal connection with each of the schools with which he and his father had a connection. Early during World War I, he reminded Sydney Grammar of a part-time teaching connection he had had with the school, courtesy of the Headmaster, Mr Weigall, during his first days at the NSW Bar in 1905. Many years later, he helped All Saints College in publication of their school history, in part a celebration of Edwin's tenure there. He went to his grave as an "Old Boy" of Brentwood and Clifton. Post World War I, when he and his wife "Effie" (Ethel Clara Young) relocated from Canberra to Sydney, he called his Lindfield home "Clifton".
- 30 Charles cannot be fully appreciated unless assessed in this milieu.
- 31 Much of what he wrote (as a journalist, war correspondent, historian and public commentator), *before and after* World War I, was informed by "The Arnold Tradition" as he subsequently labelled it. What he wrote about "The Anzac Spirit" *after* the first Anzac Day, at Gallipoli, in 1915 was written in

substantially the same terms as his *pre-war* description of “The Australian character” in a series of newspaper articles he published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on successive Saturdays, between 1 June 1907 and 20 July 1907 inclusive.

- 32 Those articles marked Charles Bean’s transition from the law to journalism. They also invite inquiry as to whether (and, if so, how much of) Australia’s foundation myth of “mateship” owes its origins, not simply to the Australian Diggers’ experience of war or outback camaraderie, but (surprisingly) to The Arnold Tradition, the 19th century exemplar of which was Rugby School. Confronting questions about national identity, and character, flow naturally from close attention to Bean’s life and writings, each measured against the other.
- 33 After having been educated at Brentwood School, Clifton College and Hertford College, Oxford, and after having failed (like his father) to gain entry to the Colonial Civil Service (1902), he was called to the English Bar (Inner Temple) on 15 June 1904. He returned to Australia, nominally striking out on his own but supported by a close family and friends, over Christmas 1904. On the basis of his English “call”, he was admitted to the NSW Bar on 13 February 1905, shortly after his return to the State. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported his admission, describing him as an *English* barrister, apparently unmindful of his Australian birth and his fierce love of the country of his birth.
- 34 Although for a short time in chambers as a barrister in 1905 and 1907, most of his time in the law was spent as Associate to the senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Mr Justice (later Sir) William Owen (1834-1912). Throughout most of that time (1 May 1905 - 30 April 1907), the judge was engaged, as a Royal Commissioner, investigating allegations of corruption in the administration of the NSW Lands Department.

- 35 Charles Bean was more naturally, instinctively, a journalist, a writer on broad moral themes, than he ever was a barrister. His self assessment was that he was too shy, too diffident to survive at the Bar. Maybe, but he never devoted sufficient attention to the law to know. He was focused on journalism, writing on large themes, participation in public debate.
- 36 His *Sydney Morning Herald* articles of mid-1907, grandly entitled "Australia", were prepared as his time as Owen J's last Associate drew to a close. At that time, Charles' most direct and personal contact with the rural society at the heart of his image of Australia might well have been as a judge's Associate on country circuit in 1905 and 1906.
- 37 In the absence of Owen J (engaged with his Royal Commission), in 1905 Charles accompanied two very senior District Court judges (appointed as acting judges of the Supreme Court) on circuit: first, Francis Edward Rogers KC (1841-1925) and, then, Grantley Hyde-Fitzhardinge (1845-1939). In September, Bean accompanied Rogers AJ to Wagga Wagga. In October, he accompanied Fitzhardinge AJ to Deniliquin.
- 38 In September-October 1906 he accompanied Owen J on circuit, first, to Newcastle and, then, to Tamworth.
- 39 As a judge's Associate, Bean can confidently be said to have seen most things on offer for legal experience in the Supreme Court of NSW, including criminal trials and civil disputes, with and without a jury; common law and equity cases; and appellate advocacy.
- 40 Bean's experience of the law (as his parents thought, a respectable profession for a young man in search of a vocation) never deflected him from his deep preoccupation with writing, and an interest (fostered by family) in military affairs and social improvement. His first book, self-published in 1908/9, was *With the Flagship in the South*, a reflection of a strong personal interest in naval affairs.

- 41 The life he ultimately led was a life for which, wittingly or otherwise, he was well prepared. In his youth, under the tutelage of his parents, he nurtured an interest in the broad themes that absorbed him in later life: history, military affairs, social improvement, etc.
- 42 Although he nominally returned to the Bar at the end of his service as a Judge's Associate, his sights were firmly on journalism. He took the time to learn shorthand before, in January 1908, he commenced full-time work as a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- 43 From the very start of that career, his ambition was to be a feature writer. His credentials for that included acceptance of his "Australia" articles in mid-1907. The Fairfax family, proprietors of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, indulged and nurtured him. In May-June 1908, he published a series of articles on country New South Wales under the banner "Barrier Railway". In August 1908, he published articles on the visit of the US Navy to Australian shores, precursors to *With the Flagship in the South*. In September-December 1909, he wrote a series of articles entitled "The Wool Land" (the foundation for his book *On the Wool Track*, first published in 1910). In July-September 1910, he wrote another series on rural New South Wales, entitled "The Dreadnought of the Darling" which, in combination with earlier articles on rural life, was the subject of another book (of the same name), first published in 1911. In 1913 he published an updated version of *With the Flagship in the South*, entitled *Flagships Three*. In May 1914, he published another *SMH* series, entitled "The Great Rivers". At the outbreak of World War I he was investigating social conditions in Aboriginal communities with a view to publishing a series of articles on that topic.
- 44 The War came. He went.
- 45 In retrospect, part of his preparation for his election (by the Australian Journalists' Association, at the invitation of the Australian Minister for Defence) as Australia's Official War Correspondent, shortly after the outbreak

of the war in 1914, may have been time spent (in 1910-1912) as the *Sydney Morning Herald's* "London Correspondent". It did him no harm to spend time in England, firmly within his family's social circle, maintaining his connections there.

- 46 One concrete, but largely unexplored, example of the importance of those types of connection in the career of CEW Bean is his relationship with WM ("Billy") Hughes (1862-1952), whom Bean appears to have first encountered when, working as a journalist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, almost as a first assignment, in early 1908, he covered a wharf strike in which Hughes was involved as a union leader, politician and barrister.
- 47 In all editions of *On the Wool Track* (1910, 1916, 1925 and, most overtly, in 1945 and 1963) it is plain that, in the lead up to World War I, and throughout the war period, Bean regarded Billy Hughes as "the ablest man" in the Australian Parliament, an accolade he quite possibly felt comfortable to bestow on a politician with whom he shared an Arnold connection.
- 48 Before he emigrated to Australia Hughes, as a student teacher, was a protégé of Dr Arnold's son, the acclaimed poet (and Inspector of schools), Matthew Arnold. Throughout his life, the controversial "little Master" of Australian politics acknowledged Arnold's influence on him.
- 49 An Arnold connection between Bean and Hughes, each man in sympathy with the other, might have opened doors for Bean during Hughes' Prime Ministership of Australia (1915-1923).
- 50 Another, similar connection, yet to be fully explored, might be seen in Bean's connection with Clifton College. In Bean's day, that school had, and it has since maintained, a strong connection with a military tradition. Its alumni included Field Marshal Douglas Haig (1861-1928), Commander of the British Expeditionary Force during most of World War I, and General (later Field

Marshal) William Birdwood (1865-1951), the Commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. Neither was a contemporary of Charles Bean; but Charles' antecedents, coupled with his connection with Billy Hughes, might explain why (after initial, bureaucratic delays at Gallipoli) he appears to have been allowed, and trusted, with confidences beyond those one might have expected to be reposed in a colonial journalist.

- 51 If recognition in a national *Dictionary of Biography* is a measure of national identity, it should not go unnoticed that Charles Bean scores entries in both the (English) *Oxford Dictionary of Biography* and the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. He was the quintessential Anglo-Australian at a time when it was possible to be both British and Australian; but he was unequivocally an advocate of Australia as home territory, an advocate who became more strident with his experience of the First World War.
- 52 An insightful, well rounded, fact-packed biography of Charles Bean appears in volume 7 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (at pages 226-229), authored by Professor KS Inglis. It is available, free of charge, on-line.
- 53 A by-product of over-concentration on Bean's work as a war correspondent, and an official historian of war, is the lamentable fact that he has been too easily typecast and, on the whole, ignored or marginalised by social historians.
- 54 This is all the more a pity because a strong, attractive feature of CEW Bean was his capacity for personal growth. Perhaps the best illustration of this is his early support for the White Australia Policy, which gave way, particularly after personal reflection on Nazi Germany, to an internationalist outlook. During World War II, he distinguished himself by public criticism of the Australian Government's demonisation of the Japanese enemy. His life and

writings provide a means by which developments in Australian society can be gauged. His constancy of character facilitates that. Through him, we can chart how a good man, dedicated to Truth and fair play, *could* see the world. By such means, we may better understand our history, and ourselves.

55 Charles Bean is full of surprises. He is not easily typecast. We do ourselves, and him, a disservice if we try to contain his legacy within a war setting.

56 The Charles Bean story is too large to be told in only one sitting. For those interested in my perspective of him, more elaborate papers than this can be found on the website of the Supreme Court of NSW (“The Forgotten CEW Bean”, 10 November 2016; “A Literary Event, the Launch of *Bearing Witness*”, 12 April 2015) and on the website of the Francis Forbes Society for Australian Legal History (“Be Substantially Great in Thyself: Getting to Know CEW Bean; Barrister, Judge’s Associate, Moral Philosopher”, 19 April 2011). Suggestions for further reading can be found there also.

57 For my own part, a favourite quotation from the writings of CEW Bean is the following extract from *On the Wool Track* (1963 revised edition), at page 132, with emphasis added:

“That general determination – to stand by one’s mate, and to see that he gets a fair deal whatever the cost to one’s self – means more to Australia than can yet be reckoned. It was the basis of our economy in two world wars and is probably its main basis in peace time. Whatever the results (and they are sometimes uncomfortable), may it long be the country’s code.”

58 What such an outlook meant for Bean as a “social missionary” is perhaps best captured by extracts from the secular sermons he addressed to Australians, first, at the end of the First World War and, then, during the Second World War, in anticipation of postwar reconstruction.

59 The following extract is taken from the introductory paragraphs of a chapter on education found in *In Your Hands, Australians*, published in 1918 and republished in 1919:

“A country is not as happy nor as prosperous as it ought to be unless it is making full use of all the brains, character, and bodily strength of every new citizen that is born into its nation. If, for example, a country possesses children who might grow up into brilliant artists, singers, and musicians, but for want of a scheme of education it leaves them to learn only the three R’s, or even unable to read or write, then it is not going to enjoy the music, or pictures, or songs which it might enjoy. If it has, amongst its poorer children, some who have the sort of intellect to be able to invent, after years of experiment, a method of carrying peaches and apricots fresh to the English or North American market at their mid winter; if it possesses such a boy or girl and yet leaves him or her with only sufficient education to sit upon the tailboard of a delivery van or run messages in an office, then it is going to be much poorer than it ought to be. For a system of delivering fresh peaches in Europe would probably make every Australian a little wealthier.

The nation likely to be most prosperous and happy is the one in which every boy and girl is enabled to use his or her brain and character in exactly the work for which they are best fitted, so that this country gets the whole value out of every citizen in it. To see that every young citizen fills, as far as possible, exactly the job he is most capable for – that is the object of the States system of education. It should not only enable each youngster to reach the employment he is best fitted for; it should, with all its power, encourage him to do so.

How can the State best do that: ensure that the son of a dustman, if he has the capacity for it, becomes a judge of the High Court, while the only person who becomes a dustman is the man who is fitted for it, whatever his birth? And á propos of that, some people have said: ‘If you improve the brains of every boy to their best capacity, you will not have anyone fit for a dustman. Nor for a ploughman. Nor for a labourer.’ Well, what if we do not, is it going to be any worse for our country if, in the end, the dustman becomes an engineer driving a machine which automatically does the work of twenty dustmen, or if the old farmhand with a hoe becomes a skilled farm mechanic driving a motor plough, or the only wharf labourer, some day, a brakeman superintending some elaborate hydraulic machinery for discharging ships? That is the way these old manual industries of the older centuries are already developing in the new world with advanced education and brilliant invention. Is not that an ideal to work for, if education can bring it about?

But that is straying from the point. How can the State ensure that each young Australian who comes into the world drops as nearly as possible into the work in life which his brain and character fit him for?

Only by a system of education which gives to every child born an equal chance (and positive active encouragement) to develop every ounce of brain power, physical strength, and manly or womanly character that is in them; which takes them from the Primary School, if they have capacity, either to the High School or the Trade School, and from there to the University or the Agricultural College or the Technical School, or Commonwealth Military or Naval College, or to a School for the Merchant Sea Service of Australia, or the Conservatorium of Music or Painting or Sculpture in any of our great towns, or possibly even in some of the big country centres – which lies open; in short, to every Australian child the whole, well thought out, carefully planned educational system which we will some day have in the new Australia. You have to make that system, young Australians. It is one of the greatest works, perhaps the greatest, that you can do for your country. You can help in it either by thinking out and supporting the creation of such a system, or, ten times better still, by taking part in it as teachers *for the sake of the work you will be doing for Australia*”

- 60 Similar sentiments can be found in *War Aims of the Plain Australian*, published in 1943 and republished in 1945.
- 61 *In Your Hands, Australians* and *War Aims of the Plain Australian* are long out of print, as is *On the Wool Track*. We would do well to have them republished, together with other writings of Charles Bean on civil society, with informed historical and social commentary. We are not beyond learning afresh from CEW Bean.

GCL

19/4/2017