

“Amongst the Portraits”

Speech to the St Paul’s College Union

18 June 2022

The Hon. A S Bell

Chief Justice of New South Wales

- 1 I begin by acknowledging the Gadigal of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to elders, past and present.

- 2 In that context, I particularly acknowledge Jack Manning Bancroft, founder of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, and the 20 Indigenous scholars that have followed in his large footsteps with the support of the College Foundation. Jack is one of the College’s many alumni who do not fit the unfortunate stereotyped media profile of the students who have passed through St Paul’s. Professor Patrick McGorry AO, Australian of the Year in 2010, is another, as is E.G Whitlam AC QC whose portrait at the back of the Hall by Clifton Pugh I have always thought was marvellous. Gough, as painted by Pugh, is deliberately too big for the frame, refusing to be boxed in by his large thoughts and grand vision.

- 3 It is wonderful to be back in this Hall which holds so many memories for all who are here: rousing albeit slightly idiosyncratic renditions of *Jerusalem* and *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, spontaneous chants of “*We love the Warden*”, stylish academic dinners with distinguished speakers, less stylish victory dinners in the years when inter-College sport was properly amateur, formals and jazz dinner dances, debates, and all manner of performances. But perhaps most of all, routine dinners where lasting friendships were forged over discussion, undistracted by mobile phones and social media.

- 4 Monday dinners would begin with a thin consommé soup. As the week wore on, the leftover consommé would be supplemented by other more substantial leftovers from other meals so, by Thursday night, we would be eating a more substantial Minestrone “a la Nationwide”, or a heavily curried Mulligatawny with

recognisable reminders of meals served earlier in the week! Minute steaks, on the tough side, were referred to as brake pad. And, as term approached its conclusion, and the providing budget was all but spent, there was tomato soup which seemed to be little more than tomato sauce with hot water. But it was the company that mattered!

5 Now the first object of the St Paul's College Union is, and I quote, "to unite the past and present members of the College". That is what we are doing tonight and it is wonderful to be able to do so after a gap of almost three years and to see so many friends and familiar faces.

6 Without wishing to turn this occasion into a séance (although that might be fun), I want to endeavour to further the Union's first object of uniting past and present members of the College by also uniting the living and the dead and speaking of some of the Paulines whose portraits hang on the walls of this Hall.

7 But let me start with a confession which relates to this Hall.

8 I once gave a speech at this very lectern in which I described the Hall as the oldest part of the oldest College in the oldest University in Australia. Only two aspects of that three-pronged claim are correct.

9 I recently learnt that St Paul's is not the oldest College in Australia – that distinction goes to Christ's College in Tasmania, which was founded in 1846, which was almost 50 years prior the foundation of the University of Tasmania, in 1890. And it should be noted that that College closed for 23 years between 1856 and 1879 and again for 20 years between 1892 and 1911. So Christ's College, Hobart is only the oldest if you ignore those hiatuses which, of course, we shouldn't!

10 One has to be careful with dates and Tasmania. My friend the Chief Justice of Tasmania, Justice Alan Blow AO, who originally hales from Sydney, always begins his speeches by recounting that he and his wife left Balmain for Hobart in March 1976 and arrived in October 1958.

- 11 Returning (circuitously) to Christ's College, Hobart, there is a connection between that place and St Paul's in that our 10th Warden, Canon Ivan Head, was Master of Christ's College immediately prior to moving to this place in 1995. I got to know Ivan well during my time on the Council and I am so pleased to see many old friends from my time on the Council here tonight. I particularly acknowledge Steve McMillan whose vision, drive and extraordinary generosity provided the College with the best post-graduate accommodation to be found anywhere in the world.
- 12 Ivan Head, smiling down at us to my right, was and is a deeply reflective thinker and a fine poet, although his nonsense poems and occasional limericks delivered in Hall may perhaps best be described as "obscure" – I hope that that is a sufficiently neutral term! I am sure that he wouldn't mind.
- 13 There are lots of other old Wardens in this Hall, also smiling down upon us. Dr Lewis Bostock Radford, Canon Arthur Garnsey and Dr Felix Arnott, of course, all have buildings named after them, as does Ivan, who typically wanted the new building to be called Head Quarters because he could never pass up the opportunity for a verbal quip.
- 14 After Dr Arnott left the Wardenship to become Archbishop of Brisbane, Peter Bennie became Warden. His nickname was "The Toad" which I had always thought was a term of affection until I read Alan Atkinson's wonderful history of the College earlier this week, having only dipped into it in the past. His strong support for the Mansfield Library was evidently not shared by the students. Peter Bennie retired just before I started at College in 1985 when, for reasons I never learnt, I was given a room in Lower Radford together the nickname "Fresher Fireplace" (and probably a few other nicknames beside). This allocation did not endear me to number of more senior students but I dug in!
- 15 One more senior student at the time was Charles Victor Emmanuel Salisbury, whose brilliant medical fellowship robes I always admired. He was a very senior student indeed, having returned to College in the 1980s some 60 years after coming up in the 1920s under Arthur Garnsey. Salisbury notched up a couple

of Bachelors degrees during his second coming. He and I both studied economic history. We used to talk about the Professor of Economic History at the time who was an American, Stephen Salsbury (different spelling) who lived at St Andrew's College and was widely rumoured (baselessly I suspect) to be a CIA operative!

- 16 In the mid-1980s, Charles Salisbury was always on hand in the quadrangle to provide medical certificates when deadlines approached too quickly. Happily, no one in authority questioned what basis a former leading obstetric surgeon who had long since retired from practice had for issuing such notes to 20 year old boys who appeared to the world to be in rude health!
- 17 My Warden was Bishop Maxwell McNee Thomas, who came to this place in Easter 1985 from Wangaratta where he had been the Bishop for many years. You can admire his portrait in the Hall with his hair slicked back, looking for all the world like he is promoting "brylcream". For the younger members in the audience, Brylcream was a slightly perfumed gel you could put in your hair which slicked it down – today it would be called "product".
- 18 It used to be advertised as follows: "A dab a day will do you and the girls will all pursue you". I tried it and it didn't work – one of a number of failed strategies I pursued at College including a stint as coach of the Women's College softball team, a job for which my ability was exceeded by my aspiration for companionship! I might just leave it at that.
- 19 Max Thomas was the first Warden, now followed by Ed Loane, to have been a student in College. He is probably the only Warden to have had a port bottled by the gentlemen of the wine cellar in his honour. It was labelled "Mad Max" and would be rated "vin très ordinaire"! That didn't stop us drinking it.
- 20 I remember when Max was appointed Warden, someone unkindly dug around in the archives to find out what Archbishop Felix Arnott had said of him as a student. What was found was not altogether flattering with suggestions of perhaps a slight propensity to lounge around the quadrangle rather than

applying himself as fully as he could, with his very large intellect and scholarship income.

- 21 These mis-assessments can happen to the best of us. I had a classics teacher at Grammar who wrote in one of my school reports – “Results quite good but the obvious tends to elude him”. The same teacher, in response to some (I thought) witty interjection in class, made me write out 100 times “I may be a bell but I lack a peel.” That’s what you get for a Grammar education in the 1980s (unless, of course, you were taught by Phil Barr in which case you acquired excellent taste and refinement).
- 22 To return to Max Thomas, after his years “lounging in the quad” (which I am sure was an exaggeration), and then becoming ordained and ministering in Singelton, Surrey and then The Entrance, he went off in 1959 to the General Theological Seminary in New York where he wrote his doctorate and was Chaplain to the Archbishop of New York. He stayed until 1964. These were the years of the Kennedy Presidency and then the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under Lyndon Johnson. Living in that most dynamic city, New York, at such an exhilarating time, generated in Max a breadth of vision and commitment to open-mindedness that was reflected in the fact that he became an avowed ecumenist and leading figure in the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue. In that liberal tradition, he was a direct successor of Archbishop Felix Arnott.
- 23 I mention this not just “for the sake of the record” but because I believe he brought this open-mindedness and ecumenical outlook to St Paul’s when he was installed as Warden just after Easter in 1985. I got to know him very well in my time at College, as did my direct contemporary, friend and great servant of the College, Geoff Lovell.
- 24 Max Thomas believed very strongly in the notion, reflected in the College’s current Act of Parliament, that St Paul’s College is “in and of” the University of Sydney. I have always understood that phrase as critically important to St Paul’s College. It is part of a larger institution and must be outward looking in

its focus. It must be open-minded, not closed-minded. Insularity is anathema to an institution of learning and scholarship.

25 That is why I am so delighted that the steps the College has made in the last decade with its significant expansion, the foundation of Graduate House and the historic introduction, next year, of female undergraduates, 50 years after Peter Bennie and the then Senior Student, Secretary and Treasurer of the Students Club Committee had championed it, as Alan Atkinson's history recounts.

26 For any with residual concerns about this development, most of the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge have now been co-educational for more than 50 years, and continue to flourish as do Trinity and Ormond in Melbourne and, within Sydney University, St Andrew's and St John's have both now been co-educational for 20 years.

27 With goodwill, good grace and generosity of spirit that has always animated the leaders and men of this College, I have no doubt that it will continue to flourish under the new arrangements.

28 Let me leave you with some sage words of Max Thomas, uttered at his farewell dinner as Warden almost 30 years ago:

“We are in an age where the values are changing and people believe that things are more important than people, where people believe that money and profit are more important than true knowledge and truth itself. And where people believe that any and every community, any and every College, and any and every university is really only the same thing written over again, *and we know that is not true.*”

29 St Paul's is a unique place. It is on the verge of an exciting new era. May it do those who have gone before it proud.
