

Renaissance Man

has left the Court

Matthew Storey,
Law Society President

On Monday 18 January 2010 a farewell ceremonial sitting was held at the Supreme Court, Darwin, for the Honourable Justice David Angel.

Following addresses by Attorney-General Ms Delia Lawrie and President of the Northern Territory Bar Association, Ms Raelene Webb QC, the following address was made by Mr Matthew Storey, President of the Law Society Northern Territory.

Your Honours, I must confess that a sitting of this sort poses some problems for me, some difficulties. Normally in this sort of address I might, as president of the Law Society; speak of my personal acquaintances with his Honour.

Well your Honours, that is difficult because when his Honour was contemplating the commencement of his legal career in 1967, I was contemplating the commencement of my primary studies. So I could not claim to have a huge personal acquaintance with his Honour.



Similarly I might speak about the times I have appeared before his Honour. Well indeed, I have appeared before his Honour and from those occasions I know his Honour to be courteous, helpful and kind. Well, when I say kind, I lost every matter I appeared before his Honour in.

And as I say, things were looking a bit grim on the weekend when I was thinking how to progress this further, but in reflection a phrase sprang to mind to describe his Honour. And that was this. It was a 'renaissance man', your Honours, and I looked up the definition, using the Internet as one does these days, and the following definition appeared:

A man with extraordinarily broad and comprehensive knowledge.

Then I thought, well, this is getting somewhere. That is apt, but not really quite enough. There were two things that concerned me, your Honours. The first, one could have an extraordinarily broad

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Presiding Judges: *The Hon Chief Justice B R Martin, The Hon Justice D Angel, The Hon Justice D Mildren RFD, The Hon Justice T Riley, The Hon Justice S Southwood, The Hon Justice J Kelly, The Hon Acting Justice T Olsson AO MBE RFD ED.* In Attendance: *The Hon Justice Michael David, The Hon Austin Asche AC QC, The Hon John Gallop AM RFD QC*

and comprehensive knowledge of many things from woodwork to how to shave a dog. It does not make one a renaissance man so I was not entirely happy with that.

The other thought that vaguely concerned me, your Honours, is of course the Renaissance followed the Dark Ages. If I was to pursue the path that his Honour was a renaissance man in this Court, implicitly what I was suggesting was that prior to his Honour's appointment we had in fact the Dark Ages.

Then looking at the date of his Honour's appointment, I thought well, I am on relatively safe ground and then I see his Honour, Mr Asche here today, your Honours and I will just have to beg forgiveness.

But I pursued the path of the renaissance man. I looked again, as one does, at electronic resources, and many of my former students will know I have condemned them for using Wikipedia, but I did and I have a useful definition from it that I think may be suitable for today, your Honours.

That source of contemporary wisdom tells us not so much about

the definition of the renaissance man, but the philosophical underpinnings of that notion. It talks about renaissance humanism and if I could, your Honours, I will take the Court to it:

Renaissance humanists believe that the liberal arts, art, music, grammar, rhetoric, oratory, history, poetry, using classical texts and the studies of all of the above should be practised by all levels of richness. They also approved of self human worth and individual dignity and that man's privilege is to be able to choose his own path'.

And I thought, your Honours, that in fact is very apt. But the text took me further and it extracted a phrase from the author, Pico Della Mirandola, and I thought the passage was quite befitting a barrister from South Australia that chose to take up a position on the Northern Territory Bench. Talking about the creation of the universe and man's place in it, Mirandola wrote:

He therefore took man as a creature of indeterminate

nature and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus, 'Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee. Adam to the end that, according to thy longing and according to thy judgment, they mayest have and possess what abode and what form and what functions thou thyself shall desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of law. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power out of thy soul's judgment to be born into the higher forms which are divine.

Now your Honours, I would not suggest that with the retirement of his Honour this Court has become any less divine, but I would suggest, your Honours, that with the retirement from this Court of his Honour an element of the Renaissance has perhaps left the Court. †