

Valedictory Ceremony
for the late the Hon Sir Edward Williams, KCMG, KBE
Banco Court
9.15am Wednesday 10 February 1999

The Hon Paul de Jersey, Chief Justice

We assemble to honour, as a Court and as a profession, Sir Edward Stratton Williams, who died on 10 January. I at once note the gracious presence of Lady Williams, and express to her and to her children and grandchildren, the sincere sympathy of the Judges. I thank all present for their attendance, and especially note the presence of the Chief Judge and Judges of the District Court, Judges of the Federal and Family Courts, the Chief Stipendiary Magistrate and former Judges of this Court. I speak for all Judges of this Court. I record that Justice Demack, the Central Judge, and Justice Helman, who is on long leave, and Sir Harry Gibbs, former Chief Justice of Australia, have asked specifically to be associated with what I am about to say.

Sir Edward, or Ned as we all affectionately knew him, was a Judge of this Court for almost thirteen years, from 13 May 1971 until 17 February 1984. His appointment culminated a strikingly successful twenty-five year practice at the Bar, which he commenced in 1946 following war service as a pilot in both the RAAF and the RAF. He rose to the rank of Queen's Counsel in 1965. To the time of his appointment to the Court in 1971, he had been President of the Bar Association of Queensland. As well as discharging his immediate judicial duties, Sir Edward chaired the Parole Board from 1976 to 1983, and between 1977 and 1980, he served on various Royal Commissions, including notably the Australian Royal Commission of Inquiry into Drugs. He was a member of the International Narcotics Control Board.

Sir Edward's life displayed an extraordinary level of community involvement: an extensive commitment to the Queensland Turf Club, of which he was Chairman from 1980 to 1981, Chairman of the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games, and following its phenomenal success, Commissioner-General of Expo '88, among other things. His valuable contribution to public affairs was acknowledged by his being designated both Queenslander of the Year and Australian of the Year, and by the conferring of high ranks of knighthood, first as Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and later as Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George.

Today we particularly recall and acknowledge our former colleague's contribution to the law. He will be remembered, I suggest, as a progressive no-nonsense judge determined to resolve disputes with the greatest possible efficiency.

A slight indication that he did not fit the then traditional judicial model may be gathered from his official photograph in the gallery outside this courtroom in which, though wearing the ceremonial robes of office, he is not wearing the full bottomed wig. I remember his swearing-in as a Judge, where he spoke enthusiastically of his new role. I was then a Judge's Associate. Some of the more traditionally inclined members of that court were almost scandalised when Ned, having eulogised his wife, concluded, in the august setting of the then Banco Court, with the observation: "And she's a damned good cook too" - extremely irreverent for 1971. And then as he began to sit, his willingness to cut with tradition and strive for efficiency quickly became clear: the rapidity with which he disposed of undefended divorces left many a counsel initially confused and then on reflection, spellbound; his willingness to run two trials at once, standing the one, and then the other, down periodically, to allow for settlement negotiations: which he vigorously invited. He was given to efficiency, to avoiding waste of time.

But above all, he was a talented lawyer. Anecdotally again, I recall the case of *Lewis Construction Pty Ltd v. Southern Electric Authority of Queensland*, reported in 1976 (50) ALJR 769. Mr Justice Pincus, Judge of Appeal, then Mr C.W. Pincus QC, led me for the plaintiff, and the now Justice Glen Williams was junior counsel for the defendant, led by the then Mr P.D. Connolly, QC, later Mr Justice Connolly. The case was extremely complicated and its outcome carried great ramifications for the people of South-East Queensland. After a few days hearing, Mr Justice Williams, as trial judge, proceeded to give a comprehensive, lengthy, apparently *ex tempore* judgment. I, for one, was astounded at the quality of such a judgment delivered off the cuff in a very difficult case. Of course his Honour must have relied on extensive preparation, fed by an acute perception of legal principle. His judgment was, incidentally, upheld by both the Full Court and the High Court. The High Court, I noticed, took two months to deliver its judgment.

As I have said, we focus today on our former colleague's contribution to the law. A sound lawyer certainly, a Judge whose concern for efficiency anticipated distinct current trends; but ultimately, a lawyer and a judge whose effectiveness was guaranteed by his wondrous ability to get on with people, and in all of this, he was unstintingly supported by his wife and children.

A man of the law, a man of the people: a great Queensland, a great Australian.

It was our great honour to know and work with him.

Vale Sir Edward ... Ned