

**Opening of the Centenary Exhibition, St John's Cathedral
Friday 18 May 2001 – 6.30pm**

Chief Justice Paul de Jersey AC

99 years and 361 days ago, there occurred, on this sacred ground, an event of dramatic significance in the life of both the Diocese and the State. On 22 May 1901, the Cathedral Church of St John the Evangelist was effectively inaugurated.

Four days hence a century ago, the Cathedral's foundation stone was laid. It was done in appropriately august mode: by none other than by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, personages who went on to become King George V and Queen Mary. They did so during what the experience of subsequent years has shown was a characteristically brief royal visit to an Australian State capital. The event in Brisbane followed their attendance in the far south at Melbourne where, on 9 May 1901, at the Exhibition Building, the Duke had opened the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The much venerated Chief Justice of Queensland, our State's third, the legendary, I say peerless, Sir Samuel Griffith, was present here on that grand occasion 100 years ago; as one would indeed expect of such a veritable contributor to our State and national heritage. I am greatly honoured, as Chief Justice 14 places down the line, to speak on this historically significant occasion a century later.

Unsurprisingly, the Royal visit to Brisbane a century ago inspired great excitement among the people. Ceremonial arches were erected along the route of the Royal concourse, a route surrounded by throngs of ardently loyal subjects. Aborigines converged on the city, staging a corroboree for the benefit of the Royal visitors. A distinctively aboriginal ceremonial arch was erected in Brisbane, and that among other things interestingly distinguished our reception from that of either of our sophisticated somewhat older southern siblings, Melbourne and Sydney.

We are now, 100 years on, fortunately in the position of being able to gain some reasonably close appreciation of aspects of the events of 22 May 1901. That is possible thanks largely to the splendid and painstaking archival work of Mrs Glenda Murrell, the Diocesan archivist, and avid Cathedral historian, Mr Ken Addison.

Through this wonderful exhibition, they show us many fascinating things: the ceremonial level and mallet used by His Royal Highness ... and subsequently used at dedications as the Cathedral has grown; the crozier presented to Bishop Webber on the morning of the laying of the foundation stone; photographs of the laying of the stone; the carved alms box, usually kept in the Lady Chapel, evident in the photographs of the stone laying; three examples of the silk purses used by the children of the Diocese to save the pennies and pounds which aggregated to the then very substantial sum of £360 – that money going towards the construction of what we now know as the Lady Chapel, then called the Chapel of the Holy Innocents. Our guides encourage us to follow the development of the Cathedral to its present well advanced state. We may see that subsequent construction documented photographically, and even some of the now antique tools by which the construction was effected.

Their brilliant archival display is complemented by an enticing selection of some 40 paintings, in water colour and oil and pencil drawing, by well known Brisbane artist Glen Gillard, covering the last 12 or so years of the construction of the west end. The paintings, incidentally, are for sale.

Today, 18 May, is actually apparently what someone of note has ordained “National Museum Day”. Aspects of our Cathedral Church are probably reminiscent of a museum, but fortunately few only in the sense of things antiquated. The Cathedral is part of Brisbane’s, the State’s, living heritage.

Through our commemoration of these events of a century ago, we are reminded of the timelessness of the Christian message. We have, through this exhibition, the opportunity now, in the 22nd century, to ponder the religious imperative while helpfully informed by aspects of the past.

We should resist the temptation of using the commemoration, these exhibitions, in order, as one journalist recently put it, “to view (our church) through a rose coloured rear view mirror”. Our focus, while honouring the past, must courageously confront the future, and that embraces the challenge of redressing declining church adherence and dramatically deficient financial resourcing.

What we see about us may spark the will, fire the spirit! The exhibitions, the cathedral: they are redolent of the immutability of our mission. We stand together this evening, two millennia past the birth of Christ, and also interestingly, though dramatically less significantly, some 350 million years on beyond the formation of some of the fossiliferous stone which in fact rises around us. Oh that our commitment exude a warm glow even comparable with that of the sandstone!

Saluting those who have preceded and now inspire us, and with warm congratulations and thanks to all the people who have generously contributed to these magnificent exhibitions, especially Glenda Murrell and Ken Addison, I am delighted and honoured to declare them, “open”!
