

**SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE LOAN OF THE PORTRAIT OF  
JAMES ARCHIBALD DOUGLAS BY SIR WILLIAM DARGIE TO THE  
SUPREME COURT OF QUEENSLAND**

**22 APRIL 2003**

The portrait was commissioned in 1983 and painted in the middle of that year when Sir William Dargie was on his annual visit to Brisbane. Dad had been diagnosed with cancer in 1982 and appeared to have overcome the disease until further tumours appeared later in 1983. To my eyes the portrait is a very good likeness particularly because it reflects some of the pain and stress that my father endured in the last few years of his life. The intimations of his mortality are there particularly in the expression in his eyes and the relatively ethereal quality of his face. I am, of course, speaking comparatively when I use the word ethereal – his face and expression before those last two years reflected the normally robust vigour of his physique and personality.

Sir William Dargie had been commissioned to paint a significant number of portraits in Brisbane and was in the habit of spending an extended period here during the winter months. He continued to do this until fairly recently when his wife's ill health curtailed his travels. He is still alive at the age of 90 and reasonably well living in his home city of Melbourne.

It was my brother Bob's idea to commission the portrait and all four of us children clubbed together to pay Sir William's fee. It was particularly appropriate that he was the artist and a privilege for us to meet him during the time our father was sitting for the portrait.

In 1941, Sir William was digging a trench in Tobruk when he learnt he had won the Archibald Prize with his portrait of Sir James Elder, KBE - he was 29 at the time. Our father was serving in Tobruk as an infantry officer at the same time.

Between 1942 and 1956, Sir William won the Archibald another seven times - a record that has not yet been broken.

He came to at least one of our regular Sunday evening family dinners and it was there that we were able to come to know him as a man as well as an artist. He has been described recently as a truly remarkable Australian whose contribution to this nation's cultural life has been considerable on many levels. He has also been described as, 'a gentleman, with unfailing courtesy and with the handsome dignity of another age' and as 'Australia's most eminent portrait painter.' He shared his gifts with many other artists whom he taught.

He believes, however, that still-life painting is the art form he does best. He will also tell you that he wants to be considered as more than just a portrait painter of some note.

It was obvious that he and my father hit it off well during the sittings for the portrait. They had similar experiences during the war and had personalities that meshed particularly well, perhaps deriving from their shared Scottish ancestry and interest in reading, history and conversation. Dargie thought that the portrait was one of the best he had done in the several years before 1983.

It is a great pleasure to be able to share this portrait with the Court where it will be available to more people who knew our father, is situated where he and Bob worked and will continue to grace these corridors for many years to come.

JAMES DOUGLAS QC