



**TC BEIRNE SCHOOL OF LAW
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND**
Wednesday, 15 September 2004, 5:45pm
Law school/legal profession reception

The Hon P de Jersey AC

I am always pleased to have the opportunity to express my encouragement to the law school. I am nostalgically attracted to it, naturally, as my alma mater, and as the place where I met my wife to be. So is the Supreme Court, which still comprises Judges all of whom were educated here.

This law school boasts a distinguished alumnus and attracts those bent on high achievement. It is, I know, determined that its offerings match or surpass the expectations of its students and the supportive profession. Professor Rickett is not only a brilliant academic, he has already demonstrated an interest in progressive re-management of the school, and we wish him well in that initiative.

When I left the law school in 1970, I was more than a little apprehensive about the extent of my legal knowledge. We had been given the insightful advice that what we needed to know was not the law, but where to find it. But for all that, there was anxiety that when confronting real life legal problems in practices we hoped would be busy, time would not necessarily permit of languid research.

What we overlooked was the law school's principal legacy, which was the instilling of basic legal principle and the capacity for legal reasoning. I say that not to attract a charge of immodesty, but to introduce what I believe should be the foremost goal of the law school. That is why, in my view, formal lectures – themselves inspiring and energetic – should be supplemented by comprehensive



seminars, tutorials and research work. Of course a lot of factual material must be imparted, but a focus on practical know how cannot be allowed to overwhelm the more fundamental objective of developing lawyers – to borrow from other disciplines, the architect not the draftsman, the craftsman rather than the technician.

One could not hope to comprehend even a large bite of the content of contemporary law anyway, and some esoteric areas have taken on an intricacy best reserved for those who are inclined to specialize in them. But that aside, a modern law school should be satisfied only if it produces graduates with a ready appreciation of legal principle in all fundamentally significant subjects, and a facility to reason from that principle to a resolution of the problem. Those are the graduates who will truly value their degrees, and present as valuable to solicitors who may employ them and the clients who may retain them.

I was recently impressed to learn of the independent review of the operation of the law school commissioned by the Senate, and to have the opportunity to meet and speak with members of the review panel. This again corroborated the University's commitment to excellence in this particular centre of learning. Three decades ago, such a review would, I suspect, have been considered an anathema. Ironically, it is probably less needed today than it was then. But it is refreshing to see that commitment to enhancing to optimal performance, a law school which is already performing well.

There is no doubt the law school is buoyed by the considerable goodwill of the practising profession. The process of strengthening the link between the profession and the law school, begun during the Deanship of Professor Tony Tarr, continues apace, a recent extremely worthwhile manifestation being the active programmes of the Law Graduates Association of which my colleague



Justice Williams of the Court of Appeal is Chair. It is encouraging to see the law school drawing on the experience and wisdom of past graduates who have since carved out successful professional careers: the consequent sense of satisfaction is mutual.

One of the features particularly mentioned to me recently by members of the review panel was the vitality and immense apparent potential of the students with whom they met. There are these days many reasons why this law school continues to attract undergraduates with premium potential. Fortunately, however, it is appreciated that to maintain that pattern, the quality of the offering must be continually monitored. That is being done, and leaves one sanguine as to the continuing appeal of the law school, which is now almost 70 years old.

The law school takes its name from Thomas Charles Beirne, proprietor of TC Beirnes department store in Fortitude Valley. In 1935, while he was Warden of the University Council, he pledged the then very substantial sum of £20,000 to establish a law school. Those were the days, as we know, when Queenslanders were divided according to religious affiliation. The two stores in the Valley, TC Beirne's, favoured by the Catholics, and McWhirters favoured by the Protestants, thrived under intense but friendly competition one with the other. There are now four law schools in south east Queensland, and one discerns a degree of friendly competition among them. Thomas Charles Beirne would be pleased to note the drive of his eponymous institution in that competitive milieu.

May that vibrancy continue, may the law school flourish, and may it continue to produce graduates well-grounded in legal principle; and to that end, may it continue to draw on the wise advice of the practising profession which is so determined to see it do well.