



Marking of the restoration of Police Magistrate Robert Ranking's grave Saturday, 1 October 2005, 9.30am, Toowong Cemetery

**The Hon P de Jersey AC,
Chief Justice**

Councillor, Magistrates, Superintendent, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this sunny spring morning to mark the restoration of Police Magistrate Robert Ranking's grave. The intimacy of the gathering does not gainsay its significance, not the least as exemplifying good, positive and expeditious work on the part of the executive. I at once thank Ms Booker Klassen for drawing attention to the damage done to Mr Ranking's grave. I also thank the Director-General of Works, Mr Grierson, for acting so quickly on the restoration, and securing such a fine result. And for organising today's event, I thank Councillor Magub.

Which brings me to our subject; for when we talk of good service rendered to the people, it is difficult to go past Mr Ranking's own contribution.

Robert Ranking was born at Hastings, Sussex, England on 5 July 1843. He arrived in Brisbane at the age of 21 and ten years later, in 1874, joined the Queensland civil service, as the public service was then styled, distinguishing it from the military. Later that year he was appointed a Police Magistrate, as Magistrates were then infelicitously known. And so started over 35 years of judicial service throughout the State, including at Beenleigh, Blackall, Maryborough, Rockhampton, South Brisbane, and, finally, as the Senior Police Magistrate in Brisbane from 1904.

Mr Ranking's service to Queensland was not however limited to that role. In February 1891, acting for the government, he attempted to negotiate a reconciliation between pastoralists and shearers: shearers' strikes had brought our western districts to the brink of anarchy. As anyone familiar with the union strikes of the late 19th century would accept, this was a daunting task. Mr Ranking moved with fairness and efficiency. He expeditiously arrested those responsible for the rioting when necessary, but with restraint sufficient to avoid antagonizing the unionists into further violence. With the strike ended in



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June 1891, the then Solicitor-General, Mr T J Byrnes, complimented Mr Ranking for showing "temper and tact beyond all praise".

Mr Ranking also chaired a number of royal inquiries and commissions, including the 1908 Inquiry into the causes of accidents at Mt Morgan mine, the 1910-11 Royal Commissions into the sugar industry and the 1911 Royal Commission into the advisability of central sugar mills. In 1909, he travelled to New Zealand and the southern States of Australia to report on the administration of liquor laws: there was concern over widespread alcohol abuse.

Topically, a serving Supreme Court Judge would not these days assume such a role, because of its potential to enmire the core judicial function in political controversy, but it is the fact Magistrates were so involved over many subsequent years.

One of his substantial legacies was his book, *Queensland police code and justices' manual of crime law*. It was published in 1905, soon after the federation of the Australian colonies. As a happy coincidence, we may now both mark the restoration of the grave, and the centenary of the publication of the manual. Its English parent was *The Police Code* by Col Sir Howard Vincent, widely used by the British Police Forces and indeed the general public.

The utility of the Ranking book was covered in the Preface; in Mr Ranking's words:

In view of the fact that many members of the Force, many Justices and many members of the public are unable to obtain an indexed copy of The Criminal Code and a set of the Queensland Statutes, such a work as this is greatly required.

We still bemoan limits on the accessibility of justice, but in this electronic age there is fortunately virtually no limit to the availability of the resource materials.

When the book was published in 1905, the then Police Commissioner prohibited its use by police officers. He claimed it was misleading. Strangely coincidentally, the Commissioner



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was himself in the process of writing a rival manual. The government intervened and directed the Commissioner to lift his prohibition.

Magistrate Ranking was widely respected. At a civic reception in his honour when he left Rockhampton for Brisbane, the Mayor declared:

"In your conduct on the bench your decisions have always been fair and just and in losing you we are losing a just magistrate. This is an immense loss to a community. I can only say, and I say on behalf of the people of Rockhampton, that there has never been a Government officer who has left Rockhampton who has deserved the tribute that you have received. ... If the gentleman who is to succeed you, only half as well fulfils the duties and aids the aspirations and desires of the people as you have done, he must be a very intelligent man."

At another reception at the Police Barracks, he was presented with an address signed by 24 officers, which included this accolade:

"On the eve of your departure for Brisbane, we the undersigned members of the Police Force at Rockhampton, wish to convey to you our hearty farewell and give expression to our regret that you are leaving this town. The invariable courtesy with which you have treated us and the ready assistance given have endeared you to every member of the force here, and we join in wishing yourself and Mrs Ranking all the good fortune you deserve."

In 1911, Mr Ranking was, for his public service, made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George. He died the following year, aged 69. While presiding at a Public Service Board Enquiry at Dunwich, he suffered acute abdominal pains. Returning to Brisbane, a heart attack led to his death at his home at West End.

In the Central Police Court next morning, Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, PM, commended his former colleague:

"I cannot leave the bench this morning without saying a few words in connection with the loss of my revered chief and colleague, Mr Ranking. The loss has been so recent, and the blow so severe and unexpected, that I feel able to say but a little. Having worked with him now in Brisbane for upwards of five years during which time our relationship was of the most friendly and intimate nature, I have had ample



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opportunities of appreciating his highly cultured mind and judicial knowledge, his integrity, his keen sense of justice and his kindly and sympathetic nature. I say without hesitation that in him the State has lost a devoted servant and one who never spared himself on her behalf or neglected even in the most trivial matters in her best interests. I may say that I voice the feelings of ... the whole State of Queensland."

The Brisbane Courier (predecessor to *The Courier-Mail*) wrote, "Mr Ranking was a man of clear, judicial mind, and keen judgement, these qualities being so well recognised that he was frequently selected for important special duties in addition to the discharge of his magisterial functions. His Christian character was of the highest order. Of him it is fitting to say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'" Oh were such gracious words published of judicial officers today!

Mr and Mrs Ranking died without children. We regret there can therefore be no Ranking descendants here today to appreciate our tribute. But consistently with his public service, it is of course enough that the broader community be represented.

This cemetery preserves some fascinating judicial heritage, with at the apex the grave of the legendary Sir Samuel Griffith. The community is grateful to Ms Booker Klassen for uncovering this Ranking grave, and the interesting history of which it reminds us.