



“Celebrating Churchie and the Law”
Tuesday 24 March 2009, 6.30pm
Founder’s Court, Morris Hall, ACGS

The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice

Our being here this evening reflects two things: pride in our old school, and gratitude for its contribution to our subsequent achievement. As lawyers, we are professionally imbued with the ideal of public service, and this school has always focused on that ideal.

The only other Churchie old boy to serve as Chief Justice of Queensland was Sir Alan Mansfield, the 10th Chief Justice, in office from 1956 to 1966 prior to his becoming State Governor. I am by the way the 17th. Sir Alan Mansfield was student number 70 at Churchie, from 1915 to 1919. Sir Alan opened the final section of Magnus Hall in July 1961, the year before I came to Churchie. The “Old Boys’ Scrapbook” records that the Chief Justice said this:

“The real proof of the quality of the school ... is to be found in the character of the men whom it has produced. Many of the old boys of this school have distinguished themselves in various walks of life and their names are well known, but it is not only by their achievements that the soul and spirit of this school can be gauged. It is to be seen in the character and conduct of the many old boys whose names are not well known, but who have infused into the every day life of the community something that is healthy and good.

This contribution to the common weal has been the result of what has been one of the underlying principles which has always been emphasized in this school, namely, that true education of the individual depends not only upon what he gets from the school but also upon what he gives to the school – loyalty, honesty and service. And those are the true qualities of citizenship.”

I won’t presume to re-interpret or embellish those words.

Before going further, I mention the Premier’s announcement that Mr Cameron Dick is to be our new Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations. Cameron has asked me to



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record his regret that he cannot be here: he has to attend a dinner for new members. We would all warmly congratulate Cameron on this singular achievement. The last Churchie old-boy to hold the post of Attorney-General was Paul Clauson, from 1986 to 1989. Paul is here tonight.

I was here from 1962 to 1965, during what Dr Cole in “The Making of Men” terms “the buoyant sixties”. The school intensively nurtured our capacity for intellectual application – essential for the practice of the law. It developed our sense of community and respect for others, central to any notion of justice. The school convinced us that we had the capacity to succeed, even if, as with me, Rugby success was limited to membership of the under 16 H’s. And it equipped us with a good deal of resilience. Lawyers must be able to overcome their own inevitable setbacks, and to shepherd their clients through their own. In that context, it is with a sense of gratitude that we lawyer old boys assemble here this evening.

Warren Sturgess has provided me with some interesting information about Churchie and the legal profession. Prior to World War 2, Churchie boys rarely studied the law. In 1941, for example, the University of Queensland Law School boasted a grand total of 25 students, and none of them from this school. Subsequent years saw a Churchie shift to the law, and the school has since produced about 500 lawyers.

Now for some names, if I may. The school has produced two Chief Justices and 12 judges, including six from the Supreme Court: in alphabetical order, Hugh Fraser, John Helman, Ken Mackenzie, Tom Shepherdson, the late Norton Stable, and Jim Thomas – all who survive are present tonight, with characteristic Supreme Court assiduity. Graham Bell is a Family Court Judge, also present. You may be interested to know that appointed to the Family Court in 1976, Graham Bell is now the longest serving Judge in Australia, and the only Judge, I think, not subject to retirement at 70. We also can claim six judges of the District Court: John Hanger, Warren Howell, Philip Nase, my contemporary John



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Robertson, and David Robin. Magistrates include my one time debating partner Ron Kilner, and Bill McKay. The school has therefore produced 15 judicial officers.

Sir Walter Campbell used to describe the judiciary as the underprivileged branch of the legal profession. Turning to the privileged branch, where the rich vein of financial reward is however but a remotely subsidiary attraction, the Biggs dynasty warrants special mention. Five Biggs generations have contributed to this fine school: T W Biggs was a member of the original School Council, then his son Ernie was here from 1918 to 1923. Ernie was a member of the School Council for as many as 30 years: now there’s a challenge for our current chairman Barry Kelly. Ernie’s son John was also on the Council, for some time together with me. John’s sons attended, and his grandsons are currently enrolled. The School Council has benefited, I would like to suggest, from the membership over the years of five lawyers, as we have heard from the Headmaster: three Biggs boys, Ian Walker with whom I served on the Council, and currently, the Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Bar Association Dan O’Connor.

Our ranks include an Attorney-General elect Cameron Dick, former Attorney-General Paul Clauson; the current Solicitor-General Walter Sofronoff QC; an inspirational indigenous barrister and sportsman, in Lloyd McDermott, now in Sydney and who graced the Bar Association’s Annual Conference on the Gold Coast three weeks ago; a former Director of Public Prosecutions, Des Sturgess QC; lawyer mediators extraordinaire in Ian Hanger QC and Michael Klug; lawyers who leaven their brilliance in expert fields with a lively sense of humour: Christopher Hughes SC; lawyers who have risen to commercial pinnacles, as with Richard Cottee; lawyers who have become household names ... Tony Morris QC of course; lawyers who have become tireless community leaders, like the late Alex Freeleagus, and Greg Vickery, as National Chair of Red Cross; lawyers who have reached the upper echelons of national practice, of whom Don Boyd, Graeme Morris, Peter Rowland and Michael Klug are good examples.



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Now we are here to celebrate Churchie’s contribution to the legal profession, a contribution not just from those distinguished old boys, but all distinguished old boys, ipso facto distinguished for their membership of a noble profession. And I recall what Sir Alan Mansfield said about the contribution of all, all “who have infused into the every day life of the community something that is healthy and good”. There is danger sometimes in proffering the names of individual contributors, but even with those I have named this evening, all would I am sure acknowledge the role of good fortune, or what we customarily term luck, in their personal progressions. When I left this school in 1965, Harry Roberts provided me with a reference. It was an extremely generous reference. The second last sentence read: “With ordinary good luck he will have a distinguished career.” He was right about the luck. In an intensely competitive profession, even allowing for some natural ability, for a barrister to succeed, for a barrister to be appointed to the Supreme Court, for a Supreme Court Judge to rise to the position of Chief Justice, frankly involves a great deal of good luck.

Luck played no part in my selection of associates, however, and I am delighted to note the presence here tonight of all three Churchie old-boys who have served in that role in my Chambers, Andrew Catsoulis, Christopher Blue and my first Associate upon appointment in 1985, Jay Deeb.

While the particular lawyers I have mentioned give us a particular sense of corporate satisfaction, we may more generally be satisfied and encouraged that especially recent decades have seen an infusion into our profession of lawyers whose education here has equipped them so well to demonstrate the true professionalism which the Queensland public rightly expects.

We thank the Headmaster and the Churchie Foundation for convening this interesting and enjoyable event. I know that Ian Walker, Alex Crawford, Paul Clauson and Tom Shepherdson have played a substantial role in organizing the event, and identifying old



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boy legal practitioners. They have our special thanks. Indeed the Headmaster will now, I understand, introduce Ian Walker.