



Handover and official launch of the Sir Samuel Griffith
Clothing Collection Exhibition
Queensland Museum
Friday, 6 May 2011, 10am

**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Acting Governor**

Ms Vicki Darling MP, Member for Sandgate, representing the Minister for Tourism and the Arts the Hon Rachel Nolan MP, Dr Galloway, Ms Anderson (Museum Foundation Head), Dr Potter (Museum Director) Immediate Past Chairman Professor Swannell AM, Ms Bigge (President of the Queensland Women's Historical Association), Professor McMeniman, ladies and gentlemen,

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of these lands, the Yagera and Turrbul peoples, their elders past and present.

I was delighted when it fell to me, as Acting Governor, to attend the official launch this morning of this historically very interesting collection.

Dr Galloway was aware that on 1 March 2001, early in my term as Chief Justice, I had, at the invitation of the Queensland Women's Historical Association, opened a Centenary of Federation Display of this most interesting collection, at Miegunyah. I felt a tremendous sense of privilege in opening that display on that occasion, as a successor in office to Sir Samuel Griffith – 14 places further along the historical spectrum.

To revisit the collection a decade later, carries additional significance in this year, 2011, for this year marks the 150th anniversary of the inauguration of the Supreme Court of Queensland.

Twice Premier and once Attorney-General, Sir Samuel went on to be the third Chief Justice of Queensland, serving from 1893 to 1903, going on to appointment as the first



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Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, an office he held from 1903 to 1919. Through those positions, Griffith proved himself a truly great administrator, judge and draftsman, one of this nation's great founding fathers, and perhaps the most significant lawyer Australia has ever seen.

It is frankly extraordinary that we see today the transfer of such an old collection, but in such good shape. And that is largely due to the initiative of the Queensland Women's Historical Association in garnering, preserving and displaying the collection, particularly driven perhaps in relation to these items by the obvious interest of President Julie Bigge, who is the great granddaughter of Sir Samuel Griffith.

Usually in the Banco Court at the Supreme Court here in Brisbane, there hangs the definitive Godfrey Rivers official portrait of Sir Samuel Griffith. I say usually because at the moment it is undergoing restoration in anticipation of its move to the new courthouse to be opened early next year. That portrait shows an immaculately presented Chief Justice, and as the inheritors of his tradition, I am pleased to be able to say that we Judges wear precisely the same ceremonial attire today. The past informs the present. The people of Queensland may be reassured of the stability of their court in part by the continuity of its fine tradition.

We are told that the regalia was important to Sir Samuel Griffith. But clothes did not of course make that man. His remarkable actual achievements assured public appreciation of his true substance.

Nevertheless material items excite interest, and they are of course of the essence of the mission of any museum. That our Queensland museum now receives these items signifies a number of important things – the generosity of the Queensland Women's Historical Association, the affectionate regard of the Griffith family, the reliable and stimulating custodianship of the Queensland Museum, and in a supervening way, the real interest of the people of Queensland in matters of significant history.



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Let me conclude with an historical diversion. I earlier mentioned the portrait of Sir Samuel Griffiths which hangs at the Supreme Court. It was substantially damaged when the previous courthouse was burnt down in 1968. The repair and conservation work was then undertaken by the renowned Australian artist, Sir William Dargie.

When the High Court established its courthouse in Canberra in 1980, the then Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Garfield Barwick, asked the judges of my Court whether they would permit our Griffith portrait to hang in the High Court in Canberra, on the basis that since Griffith was the first Chief Justice of Australia, Canberra was its natural home. The judges of my Court graciously and quite properly declined, but generously themselves commissioned a close copy of the work, by Sir William Dargie. The judges paid for the copy from their own pockets, and it is that copy which now hangs in the number 1 courtroom in Canberra. Now here is a difference of opinion.

There is no question that the portrait hanging in the High Court is a copy of ours. The two works appear virtually identical. We have always taken the view that this original is the work of the well respected, renowned Queensland painter (though of English birth) Godfrey Rivers. Indeed, our original is apparently signed by (Richard) Godfrey Rivers, and the signature on this original bears an uncanny resemblance to Rivers' signature on "Under the Jacaranda" which hangs in the Gallery next door - both as to script and colour.

I understand our Gallery does in fact share the view that Rivers produced this portrait. So does the Australian Dictionary of Biography, which records that "Rivers' portrait of the Gallery's – that is the Queensland Art Gallery's – founding President, Sir Samuel Griffith...hangs in the Supreme Court of Queensland."



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Yet in the Oxford Companion to the High Court, a contributor, Mr John McDonald, former Head of Australian Art at the National Gallery of Australia, asserts that the copy portrait hanging in the High Court is a copy of an earlier work by Percy Spence (1868-1933).¹

I stand absolutely by the attribution to Rivers. Our claim is unassailable. I imagine the Oxford University Press will be contemplating a correction!

That concludes my self-indulgent diversion! I revert to the business of the day.

As the 17th Chief Justice of Queensland, I am most gratified that these memories of the third Chief Justice are now committed in an enduring way into the official repository of our State's history, and I express the hope that they will continue to interest and inspire our people.

¹ A Blackshield, M Coper & G Williams, 'The Oxford Companion to the High Court of Australia' Oxford University Press, 2001 at 32