



**SUPREME COURT  
OF QUEENSLAND**

**Society of Notaries of Queensland: 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary luncheon  
Launch of history  
Wednesday 21 November 2012, 12.30pm  
Tattersall's Club**

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**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC  
Chief Justice**

Mr President, Mr Attorney, Your Grace, Ms Bradfield, Director, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be part of this celebration today, a celebration of the longevity of one of our State's rightly venerated, long-standing institutions, the institution of the notary public.

We should be proud that the institution remains, uniquely in the Federation, in its original shape and form, with dependence on appointment by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Tradition can both legitimize and enrich. Those notaries I have sworn in over the years have seen the appointment from Lambeth Palace as a source of inspiration.

As to the epithet "venerable", I thought it significant that the former government created a "civil partnership notary" as part of its mechanism for civil unions under the *Civil Partnerships Act*. I know that the Society unsuccessfully lobbied against that, on the basis it could blur perceptions of the office of notary public. That that government borrowed the notary concept strongly suggests that in terms of public perception, the model of the notary was seen as one of undoubted probity.

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I am honoured today to launch Mr Don Seawright's work on the history of the Society. It is an excellent publication, covering the history of the office, what notaries do, the establishment and workings of the Society, in detail the process of application and appointment, and something on notable notaries in the history of the State. The Society is indebted to the Honorary Secretary for his having taken the trouble to compile this worthwhile work.

Reading the book, I was not unduly distracted by the revelation that Tim O'Dwyer's "device" on his personal seal, is an outline of Ned Kelly's armour – although I did wonder why that should be.

The book reminded me, if I needed reminding, of the high significance in this State of appointment as a notary public.

At our Bar, one's progression, if sufficiently fortunate, is from junior bar to senior bar – in my day Queen's Counsel now Senior Counsel (with a developing possibility of reversion in Queensland to QC), thence the judiciary.

Comparing the two branches of the practising profession, the barristers and the solicitors, I used in my early years to marvel at the professional longevity of solicitors: there were avenues for progression similarly with the Bar – articled clerk, employed solicitor, associate partner, partner – but it seemed to my no doubt naïve mind that the general absence of the judicial prospect denied the solicitors' stream an ultimately different experience such as barristers might enjoy – I say general only because judicial appointments have usually though not always come from the bar.

Now that was all before I came to realize the venerated place of notaries public. Veneration tends to follow age, respect, indeed reverence. Certainly age and respect characterize our notaries, and in relation to age, being well into my sixties, I am allowed to say that, though there are many notaries public much younger than I am.

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The last chapter of the book contains vignettes on notaries to whom reference would be made, when I was a very much younger man at the bar, in extremely hushed and reverential tone, and that was fed in part by a perception of age. But I now note to my amazement that when I commenced practice in 1971, the venerated George Roberts was but 56 and Joe Rinaudo a mere 48 – though Sir Neville Henderson had reached the grand old age of 72 – as many as 8 years older than I now am

Speaking of perceptions of age, the office itself is ancient. It is a public office of Roman origin, indeed, starting with the biblically accursed scribes, introduced into common law England in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the authority to appoint delegated by the Pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1279, and as we know it is that Archbishop, rather remarkably, who still makes the appointments – ever since the split of Henry VIII from Pope Clement VII.

Reverting to my theme of diversion in the practice of the law, appointment as a notary public signals, for a solicitor, recognition of utter professional respectability, carrying with it the unreserved respect of colleagues of long experience. I was reassured to see, from the book, that the appointment is not simply a long-service award, or in any sense simply there for the asking.

Consistently, notaries have this, their own society, and our Queensland Society is celebrating a history spanning as many as 90 illustrious years. I am very pleased that this written history has now been produced, recording not only the progression of the Society itself, but acknowledging the contribution of so many members – those “venerable” solicitors to whom I have been referring.

We are honoured by the presence of the Attorney, whose respect for desirable and enduring tradition is well-known.

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It is also very good of Archbishop Aspinall to join us today, integrally involved as he may be, and has been, in the inauguration of new notaries, but perhaps more symbolically, unofficially representing here the appointer from Lambeth Palace.

I congratulate the author, and respectfully commend all the notaries who have over the decades constituted and nurtured the Society.

The author Don Seawright warrants special mention. He has given sterling service to the Society and thereby the office. A notary public for 33 years, he has been able to draw on great experience in compiling this history, 17 of them as Secretary of the Society. I respectfully commend him.

As Chief Justice, I acknowledge, ladies and gentlemen, your rightly venerated position in the practising profession, and I thank you for the excellent example you set in relation to professional standards, especially those of the ethical variety, and especially for the edification and encouragement of our more junior colleagues.

I am pleased now formally to launch our latest “first edition”, “The Queensland Notary”, with warm congratulations to the author.