

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ZELMAN COWEN,
A.K., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., K.St.J., Q.C.,
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMAL
ESTABLISHMENT OF GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY,
AT GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY, BRISBANE,
WEDNESDAY, 14 OCTOBER 1981.

In March 1975, I was present at a ceremony to mark the commencement of undergraduate teaching in this University. On that occasion, the Governor of Queensland, the late Sir Colin Hannah, spoke and accepted the first honorary degree of Griffith University. Today we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the formal establishment of the University by an Act of the Queensland Parliament, and I have gladly accepted the invitation to speak, and I am honoured by the award of an honorary degree.

I have spent my life in universities, so that I rejoice in their achievements, their celebrations, and their commemorations. In this case I am specially pleased that you have asked me to take part, because I was "present at the creation" of this University. When I came to the University of Queensland early in 1970 as Vice-Chancellor, one of the questions insistently asked was what steps were to be taken to establish a second university in metropolitan Brisbane?

The pressures on the University of Queensland were heavy; the anticipation of demand for university places was expansive. There had been some tentative action, but firm decisions had not been taken. There was the model of James Cook University in Townsville which became an autonomous university in that year, 1970. It had been constituted as a College of the University of Queensland. I said that this should not be a model for a new university in Brisbane; that it should be a separate institution from the very beginning. For my part, I believed that the University of Queensland's energies were fully absorbed in coping with our own development and problems, and, more positively, that a separate and autonomous institution would shape itself more distinctively and imaginatively.

The decision of government accorded with this view, and late in 1970, the decision was taken to appoint an Interim Council to plan and design the second metropolitan university. Sir Theodor Bray, my friend since my earliest days in Brisbane, was appointed as Chairman, and he has been Chairman and Chancellor ever since, and has served the University with devotion and commitment. A note supplied by your Vice-Chancellor records that "the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland lent Sir Theodor his Personal Assistant, Mr John Topley, to be, temporarily, Secretary to the Interim Council". It may be that the Statute of Limitations ran against us, and, whatever the reason, the University of Queensland never got John Topley back, and he became successively Deputy Registrar and then Registrar of Griffith, and a right good Registrar too.

Five very able members of the University of Queensland were designated as members of the Interim Council of Griffith, and, with their other colleagues, worked hard at the shaping of the new University. One of them, Professor Val Presley, a respected Professor of the older University, transferred to Griffith as Foundation Professor and Chairman of the School of Humanities. I recall that in the early days of planning, I met with the Interim Council to talk about the way ahead.

I remember with pleasure the announcement of the appointment of John Willett as Vice-Chancellor in October 1971. He and I had been professorial colleagues in the University of Melbourne, where he had established a reputation as an innovative Head of Department and as a very able contributor to university administration. Over the years which followed, and until I gave up the Vice-Chancellorship of the University of Queensland, we met quite frequently to discuss relationships between our two universities, to the advantage of both, to consider issues relating to the wider field of tertiary education in Queensland, and we were colleagues in the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. I came to Griffith from time to time, and I admired the energy and imagination which went into the planning and design of the University in intellectual concept and campus design.

I do not think that my claim to have been present at the creation is unfounded or unjustified.

II

The Vice-Chancellor dug into records which antedated his coming, and wrote to me that the Interim Council first met in January 1971. On that occasion "Sir Alan Fletcher (then Minister for Education and happily present today) addressed the Council (and) . . . told them that the University was to be named after Sir Samuel Walker Griffith, that it would be located on its present site, and that the full responsibility for designing the academic and administrative structure would rest with the Interim Council". Some Australian universities take their names from their geographical locations; others from famous men. Samuel Walker Griffith (1845-1920) was an eminent Queenslander and Australian. He came to Australia with his family from Wales; he came via the University of Sydney to the Queensland Bar; he was a successful barrister, colonial politician, twice Premier of Queensland, and from 1893 Chief Justice of Queensland. His achievements as a politician and Premier were substantial; he was one who looked forward to the establishment of a university in Queensland, and its achievement came when he was Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. He played a significant role in the Australian federal movement. He was a member of the Federal Convention of 1891; as one of Australia's greatest lawyers, Sir Robert Garran, tells in his autobiography, "a brilliant scholar and jurist, keenly intellectual, (Griffith) had made a close study of federal institutions, and was the chief draftsman of the Constitution, the text of which owes more to him than

to any other man". That was the Constitution of 1891; the instrument was remade in 1897-8, when he was out of politics and was Chief Justice of Queensland, though he watched developments with keen interest. When federation came and the High Court of Australia was established, he became its first Chief Justice, and therefore played an important role in constitutional interpretation, with definite views of the character of the federal Constitution. His tenure of that high office came to an end with his retirement in 1919, a year before his death. I think that he may have been a rather formidable and austere man. Indeed, I was the biographer of a long-time colleague of Griffith on the High Court Bench, Isaac Isaacs, with whom he had strong doctrinal and personal differences. The greatest of Australian lawyers and judges, Sir Owen Dixon, wrote of Griffith that he had:

"a legal mind of the Austinian age, representing the thoughts and learning of a period which had gone, but it was dominant and decisive. His mind clearly was of that calibre: he did not hesitate, he just felt that he knew, and that what he knew was right. So appearing before him was an interesting experience."

Maybe words like Austinian are not very familiar to all of you, but I shall not elaborate. You will surely take the sense. I shall tell this Assembly one other thing about Samuel Walker Griffith, and I shall tell it in the words of Sir Robert Garran:

"One of Griffith's hobbies was the translation into English of Dante's Divina Commedia, of which one critic, while praising its literal accuracy, complained that it left out all the poetry. He had a fault fatal to translators - a theory of translation - his particular theory being that every word of the original ought to be represented in the translation. A glance at the work shows, to anyone who has even the slightest acquaintance with the original that Griffith, with his legalistic, logical bent of mind, was not the man to convey into another tongue the beauties of the greatest work of Italy's greatest poet. Later when Griffith was Chief Justice of the High Court, I asked him whether it was true that he had worked on the Inferno in Brisbane, the Purgatorio in Melbourne and the Paradiso in Sydney. He replied with a smile that whilst he was not prepared to give a categorical no to the question, he did not admit the innuendo."

I think that the decision of the Queensland Government to honour Griffith by naming this University for him was appropriate; he was a distinguished Queenslander and Australian, and he played an important role in the history of the state and the nation.

III

I recently read words written in the time of the Industrial Revolution. It was said that the reason why man was to be educated was "not because he is to make shoes, nails and pins, but because he is a man". We don't have to enter into arguments about vocational and non-vocational faces of education; it is enough to say that the notion that man is to be educated "because he is a man" is one which was warmly espoused by those who fashioned the academic design of this University. It was born in expansive days: expansive in terms of anticipated growth and demand for places, in terms of opportunities for well educated graduates, in terms of anticipated resource. I take the words of the Vice-Chancellor in describing the academic design. The University decided to develop an alternative to the conventional academic organisational unit of the discipline based department. It decided to adopt, as its basic academic element, a multi-disciplinary School which would not have subordinate departments, but which would be given coherence by a broadly defined set of problems or a theme. So it was that the four schools were established: Australian Environmental Studies, Humanities, Modern Asian Studies, and Science. The first of these, Australian Environmental Studies, was distinctive in the Australian university setting. Humanities and Science, operating in more familiar settings, developed distinct, and distinctively different approaches. From the first half of 1973, when the first Chairmen of the Schools joined the University, there was great planning

activity. Staff was recruited and joined in the planning exercise, and that exercise called for a thorough consideration of academic design and program, ab initio. The Schools were designed to provide integrated and coherent programs of study. All four Schools decided that they should offer a single first year program which would be taken in common by all students in the School. It was also decided that most courses should be taught by teams of colleagues, rather than by individuals.

Let me quote to you words written by the Vice-Chancellor to me in anticipation of this event:

"The choice, by Griffith, of this different way of organising teaching and research was valuable in that it did offer a genuine alternative to potential students. It was at least as valuable in that it required the University to see itself as complementary to the University of Queensland; this avoided the disabling conflict that has too often marked the relationship between the first and second universities in an Australian capital city. There were overlaps, there was some conflict, but the basic mode was cooperative."

While this was going on I was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland. We were traditionally organised in departments and faculties, with many departments and faculties, and with a range of offerings explained, in some cases, by the consideration that we were seen at the historic time to be the only provider of post school or tertiary education. For us and for the Australian university community, it was absorbingly interesting to see what Griffith was doing, and how it would work out. Let me say that I do not think that parallel organisation of universities in the traditional way is necessarily productive of disabling conflict. My own professional experience is that parallel faculties in more than one university may develop differing styles, approaches, values, and I am sure that this has happened in Australia and has enriched our academic, intellectual and professional life. Griffith's way, however, was an original, imaginative and, in some aspects, a more daring one. It gave students and their families a real choice, to be thought about and thought about hard. And your Vice-Chancellor recalls the first entry of 1975:

"There is usually something very special about the first entry students into a new university. They are, by definition, pioneers and risk takers. The class of 1975 at Griffith was no exception to this generalization: they were first class. Everything was new for staff and student alike, and it was a wonderful year of adventure."

I have never experienced that excitement; I admire the academic pioneers, students, teachers and administrators who take this high road. And a fifth School has been added; the School of Social and Industrial Administration which began teaching in 1980. With his distinctive interests, the establishment of this School must have specially pleased John Willett. I recall other proposals. When Professor Karmel and his colleagues, in other times, were considering expansion of Australian undergraduate medical schools, Griffith University made a bid. Nearby, the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital was planned, and the Griffith bid proposed something distinctive in the way of medical education. Then I think that there was some consideration of studies in law. In the event, facilities for legal education were provided at the Queensland Institute of Technology, and the need for additional medical places was rethought. I do not know what the future holds for this University in the provision of professional courses; if it comes to teach the making of "shoes, nails and pins", it will have confidence in its capacity to do it distinctively.

I know that Griffith's academic performance and design have won respect in the community of universities, and in the general community from which it draws its student body. Its programs of teaching and research provide both for the general education of students and for specialised

academic study. The quality of students has been good and has shown continuing strength; there has been a strong and substantial body of students of mature age, and this is encouraged by University policy. Since 1978, an increasing proportion of the total enrolment has been for part-time study. The University has also encouraged the development of research; in 1981 its research enrolments are some 10.8% of its total student load. I understand that there are some distinctive emphases: in Australian-Asian relations, and in the management of land and water resources.

Important at any time, and especially important at this time, have been the cooperative relationships with the University of Queensland and the Colleges of Advanced Education. From my own days, this developed with the University of Queensland in relation to computing; there has been fruitful cooperation with Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education in teacher training, and in the acquisition and operation of major research facilities with the University of Queensland and the Queensland Institute of Technology. The Vice-Chancellor tells me that the first Master's degree and the first Ph.D of the University were earned by Q.I.T. staff members.

I remember how in 1975, the year in which Griffith undertook undergraduate teaching for the first time, the wind began to blow cold. In the University of

Queensland, the promise of the greatest and most fulfilling building program in our history fell away to nothing. A very new Griffith could not be afflicted so drastically, but the early hopes of great and rapid growth were diminished, and quite severely. Originally the University was planned to grow to an eventual size of some 8,000 students, but this has been revised downward by the University to a load of 4,000 equivalent full-time students. I have a note from high authority outside Griffith itself which says that the University has a promising future, as one of few Australian universities with real prospects of growth in the next few years, not perhaps at the rates which were originally envisaged, but at a rate sufficient to allow the development of exciting new academic possibilities.

IV

Then let me speak about this lovely, imaginative site. The first site planner was Mr Roger Johnson, and the conception was an imaginative one. The site plan laid the basis for the integration of landscape, academic, organisational and aesthetic factors which gives Griffith its distinctive and lovely "built environment". In its building program it has chosen imaginative architects, and they have served the University well. And the decision to site the main village for the 1982 Commonwealth Games

in this area gave the University by 1980 a great resource in student accommodation which has been made available at this time to students from Griffith, the University of Queensland, from Q.I.T. and Mount Gravatt Teachers' College, and from medical and nursing staff at the nearby new Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

I have not been here often in recent years, and since I last came there have been many and great changes. I have always come with pleasure, and I think that the Vice-Chancellor can justly claim, as he did in the foreword to the 1979 review of site planning, that the rapid physical development of the University has not destroyed the essential Australian flavour of the bushland environment. He put it more positively:

"To study pictures of Griffith, to visit us or to work here is to experience an organic integration of situation, landscape, people, activities and the built environment which is not surpassed in any university of my experience".

It is a proud claim, and it has depended on the dedicated and imaginative work of many minds and hands.

V

I have said that the event we commemorate is the tenth anniversary of the formal establishment of Griffith University by an Act of the Parliament of Queensland on 30 September 1971. What we celebrate is ten years of active and distinctive life, first in the planning of an academic course and of a splendid site, and then in the vigorous and imaginative implementation of those plans. Ten years is a short time in the life of a university, and we look forward with confidence and with good heart to the future. There are many here today who should be acknowledged for their dedicated service to the University. Sir Theodor Bray as Chairman and then as Chancellor, and the members of Council over these ten years have done splendid work. They have been fortunate in their Vice-Chancellor, and he, too, has responded wholeheartedly and imaginatively to the tasks and challenges. To members of the staff, academic and general, and to the student body of Griffith over these ten years I offer my salutations and congratulations. My life has been committed to universities, and I am proud and pleased that you have asked me to participate in this occasion with you, and that you have done me the honour, which I value very highly, of making me a member of Griffith.