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LANSDOWNE PRESS

THIRD ANNUAL AUTHORS' DINNER

KIRRIBILLI SYDNEY 15 JULY 1982

AUSTRALIAN PUBLISHING - THE CHANGES AND THE CHALLENGES

The Hon. Mr. Justice M.D. Kirby
Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission
President of the National Book Council of Australia*

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A RUM LOT

The English speaking people are given to naming places, children and publishing houses after diligent, dutiful but little known colonial officials. The City of Bathurst is one such case. And because there were a few Bathursts - not as many as Wellingtons - scattered around the world once painted red - unfortunate mistakes could sometimes occur. Those of you who have seen the splendid imperial court buildings at Bathurst N.S.W. can reflect upon the good fortune of the citizens of that district who, I am assured, received the domed temple of justice as a result of a bungling colonial mistake. The edifice was meant for Bathurst in Sierra Leone - which doubtless still gets along with the modest outhouse planned for Bathurst over the Blue Mountains.

The Falkland Islands, lately the scene of courageous battles that will justify many a book - were named after a long forgotten English worthy - an unmemorable treasurer of the Navy, Viscount Falkland. They were so named by Captain John Strong in 1690, 70 years before the small French colony was established to give the place the name Málvinas in the Latin languages. We have books to thank for the record of the first British taking of the Falkland dependency of South Georgia. The diary of George Foster, a naturalist aboard the Resolution under the command of our own Captain James Cook tells how that famous navigator landed in three different places displaying the British colours and taking possession of the place in His Majesty's name, under a discharge of small arms:

'We climbed upon a little hummock...here Captain Cook displayed the British flag, and performed the ceremony of taking possession of these barren rocks "In the name of His Britannic Majesty and his heirs forever". A volley of 2 or 3 muskets was fired into the air, to give greater weight to this annexation and the barren rocks re-echoed with the sound, to the utter amazement of the seals and penguins, the inhabitants of these newly discovered dominions.'¹

How fortunate we are to be the recipients of this vivid portrait - made relevant to our time by the events of recent days.

Bathurst. Falkland. Lansdowne. The last name was taken from an English Secretary for the Colonies who also gave his name to pursuits less lasting than publication - a famous rugby union ground in Ireland, a cup for squash (a somewhat violent game) and many place names throughout the colonies which he once so deftly administered. It would make an interesting, if somewhat irrelevant, speech for me to tell you of the life of Lansdowne. But were I to do so I would forfeit the opportunity of saying a few words about my assigned theme - Australian Publishing: The Changes and The Challenges. I have ten minutes within which to review this horizon; so there is not a moment to lose.

CHANGING TIMES

Anyone with a job like mine must realise the tremendous dynamic forces which are afoot and which are the watchword for our times. They include the growth of government, the changing face of business, changing moral and social values and attitudes and above all the force of science and technology. All of these forces for change are relevant to Australian publishing.

The growth of government is specially relevant just now, because it portends the possible imposition of taxes on books which were first foreshadowed in last year's Federal Budget. You will understand that I must be somewhat circumspect, because of my judicial office, in commenting on the campaign 'Please Don't Tax Books'. I do feel that the National Book Council played a most important co-ordinating role to bring home to the Government, the Parliament and the people the strongly felt opinion that a tax on publications in Australia was not in the public interest, even conceding the many demands that all of us make upon government, for more and more services. It is clear that we have not heard the last of the tax proposal. Only time will disclose whether it is resubmitted to Parliament in the forthcoming Budget. An extract from a New Zealand newspaper of

26 June 1982, indicates that a sales tax of 15% is anticipated in that country on books and magazines. The New Zealand Council of Books and other organisations have started their own campaign of resistance. The Director of the Booksellers Association, Ms. Kate Fortune is reported as saying:

'What we are trying to point out is that the book should not be seen as a commodity but as an important educational and literary instrument.'

An interesting aspect of the New Zealand campaign is the production of a post card which is being sent to all members of the New Zealand Parliament and others bearing nothing more than a quote from the Prime Minister, Mr. Muldoon. He was once sensible enough to say:

'When I was a small boy I became an avid reader and in my teens and later, would have three solid books going at once and I would still be reading a novel at night'.²

Perhaps we should see if any of our leaders have been so rash as to make similar comments in an unguarded moment.

Changing methods of doing business in the book industry clearly present opportunities and challenges. I suppose most of you will have read the article in Newsweek 31st May 1982 headed 'Hard Times For Books'.³ The article recounts the changing composition of the book publishing and the book selling industry in America. The rise of conglomerates, as in Australia, brought bigger printing houses and provided cash for expansion. The old-fashioned, high risk gentlemanly profession changed. And whilst book publishing did not become the large profit maker anticipated, the changes that have come about have very largely benefited the book buyer and the book author. More books are being published. Chains and discount stores have reduced prices. In fact, the growth of discount houses was seen as a serious problem for book selling in the United States and, I suspect in our own country:

'Everyone in the business seems to agree that publishing's efficiency and marketing strategies can be improved, and that the making, buying and selling of books will change markedly over the next few years. But the identity crisis hasn't been resolved. Can publishers manage in the long run to serve both God and Mammon?'⁴

Unfortunately for erudite observers, our society is made up of intellectuals and sybarites. Sometimes even intellectuals like a little sybaritis, if I can coin a phrase. So God and Mammon must be served, for both are still terribly popular.

The third force for change that I have mentioned is changing social and moral values. These are changes most relevant for the law and to law reform. Everyone here will remember the rather narrowminded and puritanical world of Australia 20 years ago. Next to Ireland, we had the most rigorous indecency laws in the Western community. Rigid was the enforcement of the customs barrier against the mildest indelicacy. How embarrassing it is to us today to read of the fuss caused at the time by Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Little Red Schoolbook, Lolita, Oz and countless other works that were harassed and hounded in the name of the 'moral minority'. I feel we all owe a great debt to James Madison and the founding fathers of the United States who, soon after the adoption of their Constitution; enacted the Bill of Rights, particularly the ringing guarantees of the First Amendment. Although we do not enjoy a Bill of Rights in Australia, the sheer force of the American guarantee has enured to our advantage by the flood of free writing that could not be held back even by our redoubtable band of moral guardians.

The work of the Australian Law Reform Commission on the reform of defamation laws⁵, to make our laws and procedures more appropriate to today's Australia and more sensitive to problems of creative writing should also be mentioned. That report is still under the consideration of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General. At their last meeting, held in the languid air of Queenstown, New Zealand, they announced that progress was being made towards a uniform defamation act for Australia.

The last force I have mentioned is that of science and technology. Some say that electronic technology will spell the end of books as we know them. Certainly the development of videotex will change the nature and necessities of publication. But an accessible book, held in the hand and able to be revisited when needed is such a congenial companion that I cannot believe it will be displaced in my lifetime.

Technology as well as providing challenges provides us with opportunities. It has, for example, significantly improved our capacity to produce books economically in Australia. The traditional dominance by United Kingdom-owned companies in book publishing in Australia, is now being eroded. The balance of the market share is changing rapidly towards a predominance of Australian companies, of whom Lansdowne Press, as the largest indigenous Australian publisher, is an outstanding example. The changes over the past decade have been dramatic. Look at the figures:

1980 ABPA Statistics

Domestic Market (General Books - excludes education)

		<u>Lansdowne Press</u>
Australian Books (Aust. ISBN)	\$ 48.4 million	\$ 8.5 million
Imported	\$ 84.7 million	-
Export	\$ 11.2 million	\$ 1.5 million
Total	\$144.3 million	\$10.0 million

Market Shares (General Books - domestic)

	<u>1972</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1982</u>
Australian Books	10% (est.)	41%	50% (est.)
Imported Books	90% (est.)	59%	50% (est.)

As well, Lansdowne is probably Australia's largest exporter of books. The 1981 sales were \$1.5 million overseas and will exceed \$2.5 million overseas in 1982/3. Lansdowne Press is bringing the message to the world that Australians are not just farmers and miners but rejoice in the world of the intellect; in the world of thoughts, ideas and words.

If I can mention a ticklish subject Lansdowne Press' total royalty payments over the past three years have grown at a rate well in excess of the prevailing inflation figure. More than \$350,000 is disbursed annually in royalties to authors. It is a creditable record and that dusty Colonial Secretary would doubtless be proud of the achievements of the company that today bears his name.

In publishing, nothing can be done that will last without the participation of stirring authors, of wit, originality and insight. Those who command that most priceless aspect of the culture of English speaking people: our literature. Lansdowne Press deserves to be congratulated for honouring its authors in the way it does tonight. The authors deserve to be congratulated for being worthy of being so honoured.

Big government, changing methods of business, changing moral and social values and the dynamic of science and technology. These are the forces of change that portend the challenges ahead. Looking around this room, I cannot doubt that we will meet the challenges.

FOOTNOTES

* The views expressed are the author's personal views only.

1. G. Foster, cited R. G. Glover, 'International Law in the Falkland Islands' [1982] NZLJ 191.
2. Quoted Auckland Star, 25 June 1982, 6.
3. Newsweek 31 May 1982, 71.
4. Ibid, 72.
5. Australian Law Reform Commission, Unfair Publication (ALRC 11), 1979.