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THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
OPENING OF THE SYDNEY BRANCH OF ARCHITECTS
OPENING OF THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE OF CARTOONING AND ANIMATION

ARCHITECTURE, BOOKS AND CARTOONS

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The Hon Justice MD Kirby
Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission

A STAGE IN LIFE

I have reached that stage in my life when I have to 'open' things. I have passed through the humble schoolboy debates; I have leapt over the courtroom addresses; I have delivered the judicial judgments; I have made innumerable speeches and orations; I have even received that supreme Australian accolade - the book launch. But now, it seems, I have reached the pinnacle. How can one compare the mere launching of a single book with the opening of a whole bookshop?

The latest Unesco statistics show that the average book launch speech lasts for 19 minutes and 22 seconds. As I must effectively launch a bookshop containing 500 hundred books, you will understand why I have sent away my official car. I have set aside several hours for this opening speech. If I falter and stumble on the way, I am sure you will forgive me. I have never opened a bookshop before and it is not entirely clear to me what a bookshop launcher has to do. Doubtless there are precedents. There is nothing a lawyer likes more than precedents. But they could not be found. Opening school fetes - that was an easy precedent to find. Opening a harbour bridge - well, everybody knows about that performance. The Sydney Opera House was 'opened' at least ten times by various politicians anxious to leave their mark on this modern Pyramid. The archives of the Opera House contain the many speeches. The record is not, however, closed, as the possible redesign of the approaches and provision of parking facilities will doubtless ensure numerous Bennelong 'openings' for years to come.

A GOLDEN AGE OF CARTOONS

I feel much more at home in the world of cartoons and animation than I do in the world of architecture. Cartoons have always been a significant element of critical comment on the law and its personnel. The laws of contempt of court are now under consideration in the Australian Law Reform Commission. In the past they have operated to still the angry tongue of the disaffected litigant or lawyer. But the cartoon could say things that prose would not get away with. The pictorial innuendo was both safer and more cutting than the detailed written criticism. For generations, artists have offered telling commentaries on the law by caricature and cartoon. Hogarth did it. He showed the self-contented judges of England as a parody of actuality. Daumier did it in France, concentrating on the self-satisfied lawyer, pitiless to the predicament of the client. Low, at the turn of this century, offered many a stinging rebuke to the overweening pretensions of the Bench. In our own time, scarcely a week goes by but modern-day artists offer their commentary on the law, its institutions and personnel. Indeed, I believe we are living through a golden age of Australian cartooning, when one thinks of the skills of Patrick Cook, Bruce Petty, Victoria Roberts, Les Tanner, to say nothing of Spooner, Michael Leunig, Jenni Coopes, Simon Fieldhouse, Nicholson and Tanberg of the Age, Mitchell of the Australian, Rigby and so on.

So I am glad to be in the Australian centre of cartooning and animation. But I feel I must offer a warning to the cartoonist who will cut too close to the bone. In New Zealand, a famous cartoon by William Blomfield is now immortalised in the decision in Attorney-General for New Zealand v Blomfield (1914) 33 NZLR 345. It was suggested that the cartoonist had exposed too vigorously the foibles of the law and the alleged weaknesses of a judge in a divorce case. Nowadays, it seems, judges must have thicker skins. Indeed, I can tell you that many a judicial chamber is decorated with scathing cartoons directed at the judge in question. So self-confident is our judiciary that they display their critics because all who enter their chambers will be sure of the rectitude of the judge and the error of his cartooning commentator.

Sometimes, of course, cartoons can be an important ally to the cause of reform — exposing the unacceptable and the unjust to derision and merciless scrutiny. Indeed, when things get really bad in the lower courts, appeal judges have been known to say:

[It would] need a Fielding or a Dickens to describe in words and a Hogarth to portray pictorially what happened that day in the proceedings [complained of].
ex parte Corbishley; re Locke [1967] 2 NSWLR 547, 549 (Holmes JA).

ARCHITECTURE AND BOOKS

Enough of these irrelevant ruminations. The one good thing about being a judge is that you do not tend to be interrupted when you stray from your point. That point tonight is to open the new bookshop of the Institute and the exhibition of cartoons on environmental issues.

The bookshop is a service in published material on architecture, not only for professionals but also for the community at large. It follows earlier endeavours in Canberra and Melbourne. It is a thoroughly desirable development, particularly in the insistence upon facilities for the general public. The professions boast that they serve the community. All too often, however, they retreat into their little clubs. Within that club, the service may be excellent. But just as law must be responsive to the citizens governed by the law, so architecture, ultimately, serves the passions and attitudes, biases and prejudices of the community we have. In law reform, we who are informed seek to lead and to persuade. So it is in architecture — otherwise there would be no real progress or change. But in the end, the special mark of the professional is the service to the community beyond personal interest. I am glad that this notion is pursued in the design of this bookshop.

I understand that the shop provides the best range of architecture books in Sydney with some 500 volumes and 400 separate titles. This is a modest beginning. But it will doubtless grow. I hope that teachers will come into the bookshop to secure material for the instruction of their students in the debates about the urban and rural environment in Australia. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects has done more than most other professional bodies to assist in providing Australian schoolchildren with information about the professional discipline. There is now much more discussion in our community and in its schools concerning the environment. Yet we are only beginning, as a glance at the majority of the books here will disclose. Most of the books we use originate in overseas countries. With the special needs and opportunities of our largely transplanted population in the Antipodes, it is important that we should facilitate the provision of Australian material on the environment — built and natural. We have done unique things in Australian architecture. But it is only now that we are really beginning to celebrate our fine Australian architects. I live in a most congenial home in Rose Bay designed by Neville Gruzman. I was glad to see the recent celebration of his splendid work. I will be looking forward to the release of the series 'Australian Architects'. It will doubtless figure prominently in this bookshop. I am the last to appeal to narrow instincts of provincial and

parochial attitudes. We are part of the world environmental scene. That much was taught in the Tasmanian Wilderness case. By the same token, we have done bold things and we continue to innovate. I hope that in the future books will tell the customers here and the readers around the world of the high standards of grace and design which we have achieved in Australia.

THE OPENING

I have now fulfilled the function I conceive to be necessary in a bookshop opening. Attempted humour. A classical allusion. Historical references. Cautionary tales of past litigation. Proper — and not extravagant — praise for my hosts and words of encouragement for the audience. All that is left is the opening itself. 'A good book', said Milton, 'is the life blood of a master spirit : embalmed and treasured up to a life beyond life'. There will be many books here that treasure up the efforts of Australians who are sensitive to our environment. In the hope that this place will now encourage the 'master spirits' of Australia — and a community alert to the needs of our environment — I now have pleasure in declaring open the bookshop and the exhibition of cartoons.