

Word to "Liberty of Opportunity- A History
Mcquarie University 1964-1989"

LIBERALITY OF OPPORTUNITY - A HISTORY OF
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY 1964-1989

FOREWORD

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Institutional histories are tricky things. Get a complete outsider, and the historian may get lost in the archives, lovingly kept by those who wish to be remembered. The untold stories, written between the lines and the moods and passions of the place may then be forfeited forever. The historian may become the captive of the files and records. In universities, largely governed by committees, the super-abundance of written materials presents a fairly good chance of sinking the enterprise under its own weight. A lively history rarely emerged from the cold pages of a corporation's minute books. Successive secretaries worth their salt often take pains to gloss over the nasty bits in such records whilst elaborating the ceremonial activities and achievements that lend a feeling of importance to the current *dramatis personae*.

Yet choose insiders to write an institutional history and there is an equal danger. It is that the continuity of hard-won friendships, or just civil relationships with

colleagues of many years, may make it difficult to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Most sensitive moral beings recoil from needless hurt of others which may sour relationships hitherto kept in order by an occasional civilised silence.

Considering the difficulty of the task assigned to them, I believe that the authors have acquitted themselves extremely well in recording the first twenty-five years of the Macquarie University in Sydney. The controversies and personal animosities inevitable in a university - indeed any small community - have been faithfully recorded, sometimes with Trollope-like enthusiasm. Criticism of people and things have been transcribed where essential to the tale: even where this would undoubtedly cause hurt to those on the stinging end of the criticism. Justice Else-Mitchell's gruff statement about the proposed character of the early buildings in the campus ("the committee should not agree to accept neutral characteristics only because it had not been courageous enough to face a decision on this matter") is there. So are the interchanges between one of the University's heroes, Peter Mason, and the Professor of Theoretical Physics, John Ward. The latter, "a difficult man", exposed what he called the former's "schoolboy blunders". Mason, on the other hand, decried Ward's "irrelevant purism". The book is full of such disclosures. Brave and innovative ventures which gave way to the "inherent conservatism of the academic mind". Persistent controversies within the Law School. Denunciations of the administration by students. Personal and institutional failures. Stories of the sting of grievous hurt (such as the first Council's

preference for Sir Garfield Barwick as Chancellor over the guiding spirit of the University's first years, Phillip Price) (Price died within a month of his rejection). There were other personal disappointments at this and other levels of the University. Enough of them are recorded to show the historians' fidelity to truth. Yet, where appropriate, the reader is invited to venture between the lines, as when one academic, otherwise most talented, is described as not "exceptional in the detailed running of things". On other occasions, direct criticism of one of the icons of Macquarie University, the *Macquarie Dictionary*, is recorded in blunt terms for all to see.

Not only do these vignettes of criticism and failure render the text of this history more readable and believable. They are also more in keeping with the ideal of honesty to which universities should aspire and the ideal of Macquarie University, from the start, to do things somewhat differently. True, some of the visions of the early founders have been abandoned on the way. *Pace* Sam Cohen's warning that a university is like a batch of cement - it sets hard quickly - some fundamentals set in the cement were changed notwithstanding. Perhaps the most visible change was in the commitment of the founders of the University to a single undergraduate degree. But there were many other things large and small that gave-way: such as the disdain for honours and university medals and the deep reluctance, at first, to permit honorary degrees. This year, happily, the University will continue the process of honouring all those living foundation professors who took such a leading part in its establishment. In this tangible way, they will be made

members of the growing company of the University to which they gave so much. One of the professors who will be so honoured, Professor Mansfield, is one of the authors of this book. His decency and lifetime commitment to university values as transmitted to this country shine forth from every page. Lucky was Macquarie University in its foundation staff and early students.

My first connection with the University was with Alex Mitchell who served on the Interim Council and went on to become the University's innovative first Vice-Chancellor. Recently celebrating with him his eightieth birthday, we reminisced on the far-off days when we sat with Sir Stephen Roberts, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney. I was then a student troublemaker. Mitchell, who had lectured me in linguistics, was about to go off to Macquarie. On his appointment, he initiated the invitation to a body of university people to join the inaugural convocation. Despite (or perhaps because of) the trouble I had caused him at Sydney, I received an invitation. I accepted happily, never thinking of what the future held.

My election as Chancellor came during the Vice-Chancellorship of Edwin Webb. His commitment to open administration - and to the place of the rebel in the university environment - exactly mirrored my own. Macquarie's emphasis on the universality of knowledge and disciplines; its special attention to the education of women; its early acceptance of principles of equal opportunity and the avoidance of discrimination in education; and its attack on the stereotypes, including gender and age made it, for me, a very congenial place.

Under Vice-Chancellor Yerbury - remarkably the first woman Vice-Chancellor appointed in Australia - the key emphasis - brought out in this book - has been upon research. The University's motto "And gladly teche" sometimes sent out the wrong signals to ill-informed observers. Today, the University stands, by its own efforts and by the public recognition of funding agencies, as one of the chief centres of research in Australia in the sciences, humanities and social sciences. Our reputation for research - one of the twin pillars of any university worth the name - is as bright as the Sirius star proposed for our emblem by the Herald of Arms in Edinburgh, near Lachlan Macquarie's birthplace.

So here it is. An institutional history with a difference. The ups and not a few downs of a modern university in Australia. Doubtless some of the triumphs and failures have been overlooked. Others (mostly triumphs, I hope) remain to be fully disclosed. But the main actors are here in these pages. And it is remarkable to reflect upon their achievements since the first classes opened on a makeshift campus which, with loving care and beautiful trees, has been turned into one of the finest in the country. And what is most remarkable is that so much has been achieved in such a short time. And that the best years lie ahead.

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