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PERSONS IN THE LAW (PERSONALIA)

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

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Professor Dame Sarah Worthington DBE, QC (Hon), FBA, FRSA

Professor Dame Sarah Worthington retired from the post of Downing Professor of the Laws of England at Oxford University in October 2022. She had held many academic posts in Australia and England.

She was born in Yorkshire, England, in February 1955. Her parents moved to Uganda then Kenya and at the age of 8 years, her family immigrated to Australia where she undertook undergraduate studies. At first, these were in science and mathematics at the Australian National University. She then moved to Queensland, undertaking doctoral studies at the University of Queensland including in cancer research. However, she did not complete that doctorate in Queensland but switched to law and undertook legal studies at the TC Beirne School of Law. In 1976 she graduated LLB with First Class Honours. She then undertook study for the Master of Laws degrees in the University of Melbourne, awarded to her in 1990. She returned to England for further post graduate research in law at Wolfson College, Cambridge, winning a degree of doctor of philosophy conferred on her in 1996. Her thesis concerned “Proprietary Interests in Commercial Transactions”.

After a number of further appointments in England, Sarah Worthington re-located to the London School of Economics where she became a Senior Lecturer in Law in 1997; Reader in Law in 2001; and Professor of Law 2003-

2011. She then returned to the University of Cambridge in 2011 as Downing Professor of the Laws of England and a Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge.

Professor Worthington helped to establish the Cambridge Private Law Centre and served as its Director for a number of years. She took up the additional post of Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne in 2005. From 2009-2010 she served as visiting professor at the University of Leuven in Belgium. Between 2010-2015 she undertook a visiting professorship at the University of Hong Kong and a distinguished fellowship at the Australian Centre for Private Law in her original Australian law school, the University of Queensland.

Professor Worthington was called to the Bar by Middle Temple in London in March 2006. She served as President of the Society of Legal Scholars from 2006-9. In 2010 she was elevated to Bencher of Middle Temple receiving appointment as Queen's Counsel (Hon.) in 2010. Thereafter, she was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA) and received further honorary appointments, including as Overseas Fellow of the Australian Academy of Law (FAAL).

In the 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours list in the United Kingdom Professor Worthington was appointed Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) for "services to English private law". She has written many influential text books on commercial law and practice; the law of equity and property. With her husband, Peter Worthington, she has four children: two sons and two daughters.

Sarah Worthington's outstandingly productive academic and public life has been honoured many times. Conferral of the office of "QC Hon" is a model that might well be followed in Australia for leading members of the Academy who work closely with the profession in training future generations of lawyers. Her appointment as DBE also carries lessons for the recognition by Australia of its top legal academics. Commonly they can only aspire to appointments in a lower rank. The UK's honours list regularly includes appointments to top legal academics. Dame Sarah has never lost her links with Australia where we can celebrate her most distinguished academic career, still continuing.

M.D. Kirby