



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

HISTORY CLUB

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS
IN
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

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Authorised by Geoff Robinson, Secretary, History Club.

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PREFACE

This journal is the third in a series commenced in 1976. In that year it was decided to publish the most original and best presented papers received in Australian History. The essays involved original research and frequently touched on local history topics.

The 1976 initiative has attracted a good deal of favourable comment. The journal now in fact circulates to most Australian libraries.

Our students this year have maintained the standards of previous years. The papers are relevant and imaginative. Congratulations are extended to those whose papers have been selected for publication to the "honorable mentions" listed below, and to the many other students who invested energy and hours in the project.

Howard Byfield

Graham Byrnes

Suzanne Javes

David Kilby

Danny McCloghry

Stephen Pullin

Tim Wellcox

"The Settlement of the Rivers"

"Whaling off the East Coast of Australia"

"The Significance of the Hotel in Australian History"

"The Federated Seamens Union of Australasia and the 1925 Elections"

"Governor Phillip and Major Ross – the Settlement under Strain"

"St. John's Theological College – Armidale to Morpeth"

"The Bush Myth in the Australian Legend."

C. Bacchi

P. Hempenstall

N. Rutherford.

Once again, the History Club is pleased to be associated with the presentation of this collection of essays. The finished product is a fitting tribute to the authors of the essays as well as Carol Bacchi, Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford of the History Department who initiated the whole project.

History Club Executive.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE: CONTROVERSIAL BEGINNINGS: 1952 to 1959.

BY

VANESSA TRIPP

SYNOPSIS:

In the late nineteenth century the growth of industrialisation and increasing emphasis on technology posed a threat to the previous total unity of educational thinking, and there developed a conflict between the supporters of the concepts of the "academic" and the "technological" especially in the field of university education. In Newcastle, agitators (especially the Newcastle University Establishment Group) demanded two universities; one academic, and the other technological because they were seen as completely mutually exclusive types of education. However, Newcastle University evolved from a college of the University of Technology in Sydney. The major educational conflict which began in the nineteenth century now revealed itself in Newcastle because this university with its technological atmosphere and bureaucratic administration was seen by many traditionalists as unsuitable to control the development of academic courses at Newcastle University College. It is the way the conflict between the academic and the technological views of education manifested itself in Newcastle in the 1950s, through these issues which is the subject of this paper.

In the 1840s when the University of Sydney was being planned a position was prepared for "a principal who should be also professor of Classics and Mathematics."¹ This small organisational feature says much about the view taken of education in the 1850s. It was seen as a unity, and specialisation of any sort was almost unknown. But a massive change was imminent because the totally new fields of technology and applied science began to gain advocates and threaten the hegemony of the traditional studies and the unity of educational ideas. In 1849 when William Charles Wentworth was supporting the establishment of Sydney University he claimed that it would shed a "holy light ... of Education and Civilization .. to elevate the soul of our fellow men".² This reveals the almost divine awe in which education was held at the time. A less extreme attitude but with similar emphasis on the impact of education on the person was expressed by Charles Bradham in 1882 when he advocated "classical study" to help expand culture, and "to teach men and women to think"³ However, as the unity of education began to breakdown this conception of a liberal education aiming at the betterment of mankind and civilization also began to be threatened. If Sir Thomas Stuart speaking before the Royal Colonial institute in 1891 can be believed "students in Australasia frequent the universities in order to acquire some professional qualification... [never] ... simply as a mark of culture"⁴ Thus the new ideas of vocationalism utilitarianism and the technologies themselves combined to begin a rift in educational thinking which has not yet been truly resolved.

Throughout the early Twentieth Century the study of technology became essential in an increasingly industrial age. The establishment of the University of Queensland in 1911 reflected this trend. At the inaugural ceremony the Chancellor William MacGregor revealed a growing view that "militarism... competition in industrial production" and a higher standard of living demanded that the "rising generation... be trained" and that it was one of the functions of a University to do this.⁵ He defended utilitarian education against claims that it was a lesser field of study by the rousing assertion that "Black ruin stares in the Face of the Nation that neglects it."⁶

In the Twentieth Century this necessity for utilitarian and technological education was obvious but traditionalists asserted that the university was not the place for it. In 1944 an academic E. Ashley, summarised the cries of those who supported universities as the bastion of the liberal arts when he claimed that

"the university stands for the world of ideas and ... its mission is to fight triviality vocationalism and mediocrity."⁷

To many, these very characteristics of "triviality, vocationalism and mediocrity" were seen to be embodied within the studies of practical science and technology. But these studies were increasingly becoming accepted as part of a university education and many like Ashley opposed this. So by the 1940s the conflicting ideas concerning the nature and function of universities and the place of the technologies in them had become firmly established.

In 1949, the N.S.W. University of Technology was established, an institution which was unique in conception in the British Commonwealth. According to the act of parliament it was to provide:

"advanced training in the .. branches of technology and science in their application to industry and commerce."⁸

This institution was called a university but traditionalists opposed this claiming that its preoccupation with the applied sciences was completely opposed to the true idea of a university as espoused by such as Wentworth and Ashley. However, it was in Newcastle in the 1950s, that this conflict between the advocates of a traditional academic university and a technological university really exploded.

In Newcastle soon after the end of World War II the Newcastle University Establishment Group [NUEG] was formed. The aim of this group was to fight for the establishment of an autonomous academic university of Newcastle based on the pattern of the university of Sydney.⁹ Instead in 1951 it was the N.S.W. University of Technology which established a University College in Newcastle [NUC] The NUEG continued to fight for the traditional type of University in the light of the government policy which stated that "Two Universities – technological and academic – were planned for Newcastle."¹⁰ The real conflict did not begin until October 1953 when it was announced that "first year courses in Arts and Economics" would be "available at the

Newcastle College of the University of Technology and in association with the New England University.”¹¹ This caused a furor because it seemed to show that the government intended the promised academic university to develop from the University of Technology University College. The Bishop of Newcastle, F. de Witt Batty,¹² succinctly described the basic opposition to this idea when he said:

“a University .. must be.. wholly devoted to the pursuit of things which we value for themselves alone and not for ... anything beyond them.”¹³

This definition logically excluded the University of Technology because one of its aims as described in the official handbook was

“the utilization of scientific knowledge .. for the solution of immediate problems.”¹⁴

This conflict of ideas was an integral part of the debate in Newcastle concerning the function of a university. It involved the concepts of a generalised education as opposed to training, humanism as opposed to the technologies and the academic as opposed to the vocational idea of education.¹⁵ The supporters of a liberal university education took many shapes but often their claims had a moral almost emotional tone. Oliver Holt provides a brilliant example of this when he writes:

“the technological bent of modern education .. is so insidious that .. a problem for universities .. (is) .. to try to keep alive the flame of civilisation.”¹⁶

He saw the traditional university as the ~~aviour~~ saviour of a world already dominated by utilitarianism and vocationalism. W.H.C. Eddy¹³ writes in a similar tone when he describes the University of Technology as “a monstrosity, the most illiberal university in the state...”¹⁸ However, this highly emotional authorship was usually countered by reasoned opposition to the system of Arts within a Technological University. An official statement of the NUEG showed this when it stated that

“Our criticisms imply no idealisation of the existing universities of the academic type, but they .. do imply that it will drag all education down ... if it is pretended that there is no difference between the academic and the technological.”¹⁹

Basically the most relevant ideological opposition centered on this blurring of the distinction between the ideas of an academic university and a technological institute. It was the usurpation of the name “university” by an institute which seemed such a threat to the traditional role of a university as a searcher for abstract truths.

It is essential to note that at no time in the history of the conflict between technology and the humanities in Newcastle were the voices supporting the technological university and opposing the academic ideals nearly so well organised or valuable as the NUEG and its prominent members. This imbalance in the expression of opinion in the public forum says much about the nature of the conflict. Those in Newcastle who believed in the necessity for higher technological education were placed in a secure position in 1951. They, unlike the NUEG, had no need to feel that the future realisation of their ideal was threatened by another type of university, namely an academic university.

A more serious possible reason for the dearth of material in defence of Technology is closely linked with NUC. Oliver Holt suggested that there was “some doubt whether .. complete academic freedom existed” at Newcastle.²⁰ It was a distinctive feature of the debate²¹ in Newcastle that only a very small number of the

staff of NUC expressed their views either supporting the NUC line or defending their own institution (namely the University of Technology). Holt's claim is substantiated to some extent by correspondence between Professor Baxter²² and Professor Auchmuty²³ in which Baxter advised Auchmuty and his colleagues to "take no further part in public or private debate."²⁴ This letter was written in late 1958 and therefore had little immediate bearing on the letter by Holt. However, the fact that this type of instruction could have been given at all throws doubt on the guarantees of academic freedom by the University of Technology, and on the claims of those in 1956 who denied intervention from Sydney.

Whatever the reason, the fact remained that there were more public opponents than open supporters of the role played by the University of Technology in the development of NUC. H. Barton in a letter to the editor claimed that modern industrialists and technologists had "more to do than absorb themselves in dead languages, obsolete philosophies, forgotten religion and the classics of the period of chattel slavery"²⁵

He was one of the few who managed to attack the humanities with the same vehemence as the then common place attacks on technology. The motivation for Barton's condemnation [based on a somewhat limited delineation of what the study of the humanities involved] was the irrelevance of these studies to the needs of the industrial man. It was this apparent irrelevance in the face of such large scale industrialisation and the demands this made for skilled men that caused the gradual movement of emphasis away from a liberal education to Professional training. In fact the applied sciences had gained such influence that by the 1950s (despite the demands in Newcastle) a truly classical university in the traditional mould was a thing of the past.

An indication of the incredibly rapid growth of the concept of technological university education and the size of the rift in educational thinking can be found in the Recommendations of the 1957 Development sub committee of N.U.C. Dissension within the subcommittee caused a number of minority reports to be submitted along with the majority reports. The main report in stating the arguments for an autonomous University of Newcastle stressed the need for freedom of a university from "the atmosphere of a 'Technological University'"²⁶ J.K. Mac Dougall²⁷ and W.E. Clegg²⁸ submitted a minority report and it is here that the rift becomes obvious. They made the point that

"it is at least as important for technology to be independent of the atmosphere of a "traditional" university as vice versa"²⁹

In the 1850s education was conceived as a unified whole but as this example from Newcastle shows by the 1950s that unity was shattered by the rival claims of technology and the humanities.

Professor J.J. Auchmuty was a human embodiment of this conflict. He was an academic in the traditional university spirit but he was also a senior member of staff of the N.U.C. of the University of Technology. In response to this apparently paradoxical situation Auchmuty formulated a view which had the potential to reconcile the two poles of thought. In an article written for the Newcastle Morning Herald he stated that a University had "two duties." First as "a centre of vocational education" and more importantly "of adding to the total of human knowledge."³⁰ Thus he saw the idea of the university in twin terms; as imparting both education and training and dealing in both the humanities and the technologies. It was in fact this balanced view which was eventually implemented and forms the basis for the University of Newcastle as it is today.

The conflict of ideas which had become such an issue in Newcastle was in reality only a logical development of the types of views which had been expressed since the late Nineteenth Century. However, it was in Newcastle that a totally new facet of the debate between academic and technological university education emerged. This focused on the practical organisational sphere of the universities and the difference between the administration and structure of an academic university and a technological institute.³¹ Bishop de Witt Batty revealed the nature of this relatively recent development in the educational arena when he stated that an academic university

“must be unfettered by ..
government .. controlled by
a senate .. of men who have..
had university training and
can appreciate its special character”³²

In defiance of this view stood the N.S.W. University of Technology which not only had close administrative ties with the bureaucratic N.S.W. Government Public Service but whose council was made up of managing directors, technologists, architects and industrialists with only a small percentage of academics.³³

Administration of the University of Technology was seen to pose to “the cultivation of the liberal spirit” and academic freedoms. However, it was the constitution of the Council which was the issue which caused most of the questioning concerning the appropriateness of the supervision of the Newcastle courses in humanities by the University of Technology. In the 1954 Annual Report of the N.U.E.G. it was claimed that the University of Technology was not

“designed to duplicate the function
of .. academic universities. This..
decided the composition of its council .. administration
and its early traditions.”³⁴

These things: the Council, the administration and the traditions which had been designed for and evolved in a technological university were different from those of an academic university and were not seen, by the N.U.E.G. as suitable for Newcastle's University. This idea was reiterated by the N.U.C. Staff Association in 1956 when it considered the future development of its college. The association concluded that:

“the council of the University of
Technology is not competent to
govern [NUC] .. sympathetically
and wisely.”³⁵

This decision opposing the technological council may not have been unanimous because in 1954 Mr. Ritchie^{36a} member of the staff had stated in the newspaper that :

“the product of a university was the
result of .. the quality of teachers,
the intelligence of students and the
course provided .. I am at a loss
to see how any change in administration
can affect this.”³⁷

This type of idea, that all that was needed for a good university were staff and students was often expressed in letters to the Newcastle press. However, this idea was called into question, in 1956 with the report of the Royal Commission into the structure of the University of Tasmania. This revealed the threat to traditional university values and integrity which the lay council of that university had created. As Alan Barcan stated, this situation in Tasmania showed “how the wrong type of university structure may restrict .. the best functioning of a university.”³⁸

This debate centering on the administrative structure of universities and the related ideological debate centering on the ideals of an academic and a technological university both reacted a turning point in 1958. On the recommendation of the Murray report [1957] the N.S.W. University of Technology had its aims extended in order to allow the incorporation of medicine and arts into its range of studies. It also changed its name to the University of N.S.W. and was officially recognised as a university of the traditional type. C.G. Lambie³⁹ described as “disingenuous” the pretence that

“a change of name and the establishment of a faculty of arts in the University of Technology would.. convert it into a university of the traditional type”.⁴⁰

He thus implied what many believed that this move was an attempt to disguise rather than resolve the differences between the humanities and technology. The administrative structure had remained the same and the council of the University of Technology itself had revealed that the university would still retain “the essentially scientific and technological conception for which it was created.”⁴¹ Despite these reservations the move eventually proved to be an effective way of resolving the conflict in Newcastle. In 1956 Mr. C.F. Presley⁴² had stated that:

“Newcastle was in the strange position of having a proper university college although the university to which it was a collège was not a proper university.”⁴³

The change in the role of the N.S.W. University of Technology in 1958 meant that ostensibly the university to which N.U.C. was a college was now a proper university. Only a year after this change in an attempt to fulfill its new role the University of N.S.W. granted a degree of autonomy to the academic staff of N.U.C. The aim of this was to

“provide the staff with the opportunity to develop a college with characteristics which would meet the particular requirements of Newcastle”⁴⁴

Thus the academic freedom and the opportunity to develop a traditional and unique atmosphere at Newcastle which had constantly seemed to be threatened by the utilitarianism and the administrative structure of the University of Technology was given official sanction and security by the University of New South Wales.⁴⁵ This fact when combined with Auchmuty's dual concept of the role of the university allowed Newcastle University eventually to emerge and grow as a respected institution offering a creditable balance between the study of the pure and applied sciences and between the humane and the technological disciplines.

1. Newcastle Morning Herald, 12th March, 1954 – This idea was not implemented. Sydney had three chairs: Classics, Mathematics and Physics and Chemistry.
2. C. Turney, (ed) Sources in the History of Australian Education. – A book of Readings – 1788 - 1970, Cremorne , 1975, p.378
3. Ibid., p.382 from Sydney University Review, 1882
4. Ibid., P.384 - "Review of University Life in Australasia with its conditions and surroundings."
5. Ibid., P.389 – Chancellor's Oration, 1/6/1911
6. Ibid., P.389 – as above
7. Ibid., P.415
8. D.W. Phillips – statement as a member of the subcommittee dealing with the problems associated with the provision of arts courses at Newcastle University College (NUC) Between 24th March 1954 and 6th December 1954, Development sub committee, Auchmuty Library Archives A5214 * Question 6 p.1
9. Newcastle Morning Herald Newspaper, 20th May, 1953
10. Ibid., 23rd March, 1949 The Minister for Education: Mr. Heffron. This policy was never officially abandoned but it was ignored and replaced by the promise of an autonomous University of Newcastle in the foreseeable future!
11. Ibid., 23rd October, 1953
12. An active and influential member of the N.U.E.G.
13. N.M.H. 22nd January, 1954
14. C. Turney, op.cit., P.369
15. N.M.H. 31st January, 1959
16. N.M.H. 19th March, 1954
17. Secretary of the N.U.E.G. and the most ardent supporter of the ideal of an academic university
18. Eddy to R.E. Farrell [a foundation member of the N.U.E.G.] The private collection of Mr. Farrell, New Lambton Heights, Newcastle. 29th January, 1954. P.14
19. Newcastle Sun, 23rd March, 1954
20. N.M.H. 19th July 1956 – Letter to the editor
21. As Manifested in the N.M.H. letters to the editor
22. Vice Chancellor of the N.S.W. University of Technology
23. Deputy Warden for the N.U.C.
24. Baxter to Auchmuty. 4th December, 1958. N.U.C. Newcastle Advisory Committee and Development sub-committee 1955 - 58 - 61 Auchmuty Library Archives A5212
25. N.M.H. 14th May, 1954 – Letter to the editor.
26. The NSW University of Technology and NUC – Report of the sub committee of the Newcastle University College Advisory Committee on the Development of the University of Newcastle. February, 1957, P.1 Auchmuty Library Archives – A5214 Develop subcommittee 1954 – 6
27. Consultant to Ryland Bros. Aust.
28. Chairman of Newcastle Technical Education District Council. Director of the Commonwealth Steel. C. Ltd.
29. Minority report of Clegg and MacDougall to the subcommittee of the NUC concerned with the Development of Newcastle University, February 1857, Auchmuty Library Archives – A5212 Develop. Sub. Committee 1954 – 6
30. N.M.H. 16th August, 1954
31. As the N.U.E.G. preferred to classify the N.S.W. University of Technology and its Newcastle College.
32. N.M.H. 22nd January, 1954
33. The Composition of the Council of the University of Technology. Newcastle Advisory Committee and Development subcommittee, 1955-58 -61 Auchmuty Library Archives, A5212.
34. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the N.U.E.G. 13th December, 1954. From Mr. R.E. Farrell's private collection New Lambton Heights, Newcastle.
35. N.U.C. Staff Association – Report of the policy sub committee established to consider a policy concerning the future development of N.U.C. December 1956 Auchmuty Library Archives A5214 Development Subcommittee 1954-5

36. Lecturer in Geography at N.U.C.
37. N.M.H. 19th March, 1954
38. N.M.H. 26th October, 1956 – Letter to the editor
39. Emeritus Professor of Medicine at Sydney University.
40. Sydney Morning Herald, 11th September, 1958
41. Resolution of the Council of the University of Technology Council forwarded to the NUC Advisory Committee. 16th March, 1958. Auchmuty library archives A5212 Newcastle U.C. Advisory Committee and Development subcommittee 1955 – 58 – 61
42. A member of staff at the N.U.C.
43. N.M.H. 13th March, 1956 – Letter to the editor.
44. Minutes of the N.U.C. Advisory Committee Meeting. 2nd October, 1959, Auchmuty Library Archives A5212, NUC Advisory Committee and Development subcommittee 1955 – 58 –61
45. Partial autonomy 1960 Full autonomy 1964

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