FOR COLICOI

Domingo Colicoi, of the Mapuche Indians, visited us and spoke of his people, their aspirations and the land.

He spoke of the past, the present and the future. He told of the essence of a people and the way it drives their lives, their goals, their celebrations.

His words were of the destructiveness of thought that includes or excludes groups from participation and equality, the impact of frameworks that define and constrict individuals and thereby the potential of their group. His songs questioned the value structures not only of colonial invaders but of any organisation that chases goals forged with the assumptions and expectations of yesterday.

He pleaded that to know a people you must meet with them in an open space, learn their thoughts and understand the unbalance. And then you must bring order to the unbalance.

Left hanging in the air was the question of "essence", the unifying factor that colours and characterises a group and expresses as its "culture".

We ask then, in this end-of-year Bulletin, "What is the essence of this University?"

Our functions are well described. We have a mission, plans at all levels and in various degrees of articulation, defined membership and customer groups, and well-understood products.

But do these things describe what the University is? What makes a University different from other organisations that are also involved with the production and delivery of knowledge and educational or social outcomes. And what makes this University different from others of its kind?

Somewhere the answers must fall within the quality of intellectual life, the debate of broad issues, the role the University can play in the influence and evolution of society as a whole, our contribution to the economic and productive survival of the nation, our role in affirmation of civil and personal rights, our views of morality and ethics, our concept of the group to which we belong.

The end-of-year somehow seems an apt time to review where we've been and whether or not that scenario should be carried forward to the next phase. We hope that the in-house publications can become a place to debate issues of social consequence, and the part that this University can play in building the future of the region and the nation.

For Colicoi we have made a space to meet, to face the thoughts of others, and to understand the unbalances. It is not yet filled with some who will speak their song in this public forum.

But perhaps tomorrow?

Clue: organization

organisation *

n. that which is organized

organise *
n. to form as or into a whole consisting of interdependent or co-ordinated parts esp. for harmonious or united action.

functions *

a.provision of educational facilities and the advancement and transmission of knowledge by the pursuit, recognition, achievement and excellence in scholarship, research and teaching.

b.commitment to the development and provision of cultural, professional, technical and vocational services to the community.

c.the conferring of degrees and awarding of diplomas and other certificates.

university *

n. 1. an institution of higher learning, conducting teaching and research studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate level

2. its members of staff

3. its buildings

4. its governing body.

5. a sports team or crew representing it in competition.

6. anything considered a source of learning.

Page 2
A MAN NOT LIKE ME

A man-not-like-me speaks his song. I, listening, cannot hear.

Around me in the crowd come murmurs from others who hear the hidden notes and share the knowing.

A stranger, I can only record the dim-heard strains with blunt pen carving shards of melody.

And wonder what my song should be.

"It is sad," the man-not-like-me says, "to see your people behind the glass windows of a museum. Museums are for a dead people. Anthropologists and universities study us as if we are not here any more. Like wraiths we are the shadows of the real. To learn about another people you can not put them behind a glass window or between the pages of a book. To learn about a people you must meet them in an open space like this. You must learn their thoughts.

"These others don’t recognise our history that has a past, a present, and a future. They don’t recognise the history we had before they knew we were here. They don’t recognise the history we have now, the history we make day by day.

"The struggle of our people is for our ways of life. We don’t have another way to live other than our way of living.

"When they dam our land they take our sacred rivers. When they mine our land they take our sacred places. What happens to a people who have no sacred places?

"We are tired. We have resisted for 500 years. We want to heal our people. We want to live in peace, linked to our land.

"Our essence is the land."

"Ours too" says a woman who seems like me, but who hears this song that I am deaf for.

"What happens to a people when you steal their very essence? In this other culture that is not like ours they separate their language, and dance and art and take it away from their spirituality. Their relationship with the land is economic. And sometimes economics rules these other things too. That is not like us.

"Where is their essence, these others?"

"Yes" he says. "There cannot be a separation of these things. Read my song. I am happy. But I must fulfil my duty to understand the unbalance of my land, and bring order to it. I must sing in unison with the voice and heart and brain of others. It is our responsibility to face our history. We must open up spaces between us so that we can talk together. Or else we must go on meeting in conflict."
"For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of his life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall."

A CHRISTMAS PAST: PERCEPTIONS OF A BIT-PLAYER.

The bit-players and passers-by of history speak their lines on a stage built for leading actors. This belies the everyday dialogue of those whose names don’t head History’s "Who’s Who". Christmas is a big story. That of the University is really quite small in the global context. But our story too has a lot of "innkeeper’s wives" who would probably tell it differently. It makes you wonder what our un-approved biography would say if the innkeeper’s wives told the story?

THE INNKEEPER’S WIFE

I love this byre. Shadows are kindly here.
The light is flecked with travelling stars of dust.
So quiet it seems after the inn clamour.
Scrapping of fiddles and stamping feet.
Only the cows, each in her patient box,
Turn their slow eyes, as we and the sunlight enter,
Their slowly rhythmic mouths.

"That is the stall,
Carpenter. You see it’s too far gone
for patching or repatching. My husband made it,
And he’s been gone these dozen years and more ...."

Strange how this lifeless thing, degraded wood
Split from the tree and nailed and crucified
To make a wall, outlives the mastering hand
That struck it down, the warm firm hand
That touched my body with its wandering love.

‘No let the fire take them. Strip every board
And make a new beginning. Too many memories lurk
Like worms in this old wood. That piece you’re holding-
That patch of grain with the giant’s thumbprint-
I stared at it a full hour when he died:
Its grooves are down my mind. And that board there
Baring its knot-hole like a missing jig-saw -
I remember another hand along its rim.
No, not my husband’s, and why I should remember
I cannot say. It was a night in winter,
Our house was full, tight-packed as salted herrings -
So full, they said, we had to hold our breaths
To close the door and shut the night-air out!
And then two travellers came. They stood outside

Across the threshold, half in the ring of light
And half beyond it. I would have let them in
Despite the crowding - the woman was past her time -
But I’d no mind to argue with my husband,
The flagon in my hand and half the inn
Still clamouring for wine. But when trade slackened,
And all our guests had sung themselves to bed
Or told the floor their troubles, I came out here
Where he had lodged them. The man was standing
As you are now, his hand smoothing that board. -
He was a carpenter, I heard them say.
She rested on the straw, and on her arm
A child was lying. None of your creased-faced brats
Squalling their lungs out. Just lying there
As calm as a new-dropped calf - his eyes wide open,
And gazing round as if the world he saw
In the chaff-strewn light of the stable lantern
Was something new and beautiful and strange.
Ah well, he’ll have learnt different now, I reckon,
Wherever he is. And why I should recall
A scene like that, when times I would remember
Have passed beyond reliving, I cannot think.
It’s a trick you’re served by old possessions:
They have their memories too - too many memories.
Well, I must go in. There are meals to serve.
Join us there, Carpenter, when you’ve had enough
Of cattle-company. The world is a sad place,
But wine and music blunt the truth of it."

From Anglican Digest, Michaelmas 1992
A TALE OF TWO HEMISPHERES

The bit players are sometimes known to us only through the roles they play when we meet. Their "other roles" cross the major plot, lend it depth and sometimes bring explanations and context to the characters we saw in raw dialogue.

It was the crisp cold sunny morning following Christmas Day, 1955.

Chugging along the lanes of Southern England was a 1934 Austin Light Twelve sedan with wonky steering and no heating, heading for Norwich, 150 miles away. A wind-filled baby slept uneasily on the back seat. Her youthful parents had resumed a weeks-old acrimonious argument: if he was offered and took a job in Australia, she and the child would have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, up the gangplank.

We were bowling along reasonably cheerfully and then we entered what can only be described as a nightmare into a dark, freezing, heavy fog which layover to the church in light snow and the landscape as the steam train lumbered up through the Breckland was bleak and curried eggs. On Boxing Day a car trip over frosty roads with heaps of snow covering the roadside piles of sugarbeet into Norwich for the Pantomime Aladdin and his Magic Lamp. Before the destruction of hedgerows in the 1960's, the Norfolk scenery in winter kept a fine austere beauty of bare bough traceries mantled with light snow against dark winter skies.

Christmas 1950 was spent with old friends and family in a Norfolk Rectory. There had been snow early in December, but the landscape as the steam train lumbered up through the Breckland was bleak rather than snowy. As the air of wartime austerity remained, fuel was rationed as well as food, and I spent some time with the son of the family cutting winter fuel in the Glebe wood beyond the Rectory garden, and then a busy Christmas Eve in a freezing medieval church - no heating till Christmas morning - polishing all the altar brass and rails. The next morning we went over to the church in light snow and the elderly deaf organist - apt to play the Jubilate when told to perform the Venite - unfortunately got everything right in an excellent service in a full church. Despite rationing, Christmas dinner was a major success with off-ration turkey and rationed pickled pork. On Boxing Day we put on a residents' party for friends, staff and the Director's family, for which I spent time preparing savouries and curried eggs. Some snow in early December had already melted and the day dawned clear. After walking from Kolonaki across the Botanical Gardens we attended the morning service at St. Paul's English Church in Philellenon and stopped on the return journey to watch little infants in the neighbouring Russian Cathedral being given their Christmas communion with patient care by the priest using a spoon and the assistance of an elderly nun. Afterwards midday drinks were taken under bright sunshine in shirtsleeves in the Director's garden and followed by a splendid meal in the main building of the School. In the evening we entertained our neighbours from the American School across the tennis court with alcohol and parlour games. There was little activity before noon on Boxing Day, but we got up later again to bright sunshine - a not uncommon feature of mid winter in Greece.

Marjorie Biggins

AN ACADEMIC ABROAD

Christmas 1956. Relationless, fogless, warmed by kindness and hospitality but nevertheless homesick, we were looking forward to the ritual of Christmas morning drinks. The Warden of the University College was James Auchmuty, later to become the University’s first Vice-Chancellor, and staff were invited to his house by the ocean, across the Stockton sandhills. Staff who hadn’t gone home to families turned up. The women sat with Margaret Auchmuty and talked of Christmases in other places. The men, led off by James, marched along the beach and listened to his plans for a University based on a community of scholars, punctuated by more mundane and sometimes scurrilous gossip.

Our Christmas Day ended with a walk that night to Bar Beach where I went to the end of the breakwater and felt I had got that little bit closer to Britain. To which my husband replied that I had actually got a little bit further away and was heading towards New Zealand.

Godfrey Tanner
"RECEIVED FROM VICE-CHANCELLOR...
ONE NEW UNIVERSITY"

I recall 1974 as a year which never seemed mundane or dull.

Newcastle was buffeted by the Sygna Gale and Darwin was flattened by Cyclone Tracy.

Meanwhile, the University of Newcastle was experiencing its own upheaval. It had reached a very important point in its development when it had to “drop the pilot”, and the forthcoming retirement at the New Year of the first Vice-Chancellor, Professor James Auchmuty, was exercising the minds of many people.

Obviously, people would feel a sense of loss when a leader with Auchmuty’s fine record (he was also one of the real personalities around the place) left.

As his final days approached, the University went through an extended process of farewells and special ceremonies to mark his contribution to the growth of the institution’s activities.

After conducting a lengthy search, the Council had appointed Professor Don George, a young professor of engineering from the University of Sydney, to succeed the Foundation Vice-Chancellor and this pleased many people.

The Library and the Sports Centre were re-named the Auchmuty Library and Auchmuty Sports Centre as tributes to the retiring Professor.

The Vice-Chancellor ate his lunch practically every day in the Staff House and in an operation with echoes of an Irish wake the Staff House organised New Year’s Eve Revels for members of the club and their friends.

With a few weeks to go, James spoke at functions and wrote a great deal to indicate his feelings. In University News he said: “I am going to miss those friendships and feelings of belonging to a co-operative venture which was creating history in the Hunter Valley and achieving outstanding success.”

Colin Anderson, one of the most memorable characters from the University’s Tighes Hill days, who was a star in the Student Players, put on a biting revue in the Drama Theatre, with a cast of five. Afterwards, there was supper, champagne, dancing and whoopee until the early hours.

Following the revue and at approximately midnight, a mock changeover of the administration of the university was held in the Staff House - James Auchmuty handed over his Vice-Chancellor’s mortar board and keys to Don George.

I remember vividly the staff and others present being amazed and humoured by Professor George’s next move. He produced an oversized receipt, about five feet long, and presented it to Professor Auchmuty. A University had been handed over.

John Armstrong

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the ghost.
"That they are what they are, do not blame me!"
HAIL & FAREWELL

Perhaps it is a reflection of my age, perhaps it is because my retirement is closer, or perhaps it happens to all of the Scrooges of the world, but I am visited by Ghosts of Christmases past.

Twenty years ago, I attended my first Hail and Farewell University Dinner - part of the legend of James Johnston Auchmuty, Founding Vice-Chancellor of the University. They were attended by invitation and were paid for by the Vice-Chancellor.

On an early summer evening, we walked from the car park towards Edwards Hall, Moira in a smart cocktail frock, and me in academic gown with a clear trickle of sweat running down my spine. As we walked towards the entrance, other couples, similarly attired and with similar trickles of sweat, converged on the entrance. We all nodded politely, recognising few - though many of us would be well acquainted before the evening was over.

At the entrance to Edwards Hall, we queued to be greeted by our Hostess and Host. Margaret Auchmuty was wearing Seahorse earrings, part of her collection of the University’s emblem. As I reached to shake hands with the Vice-Chancellor, I thought that there must have been a commotion behind me, since Professor Auchmuty looked over my right shoulder towards the entrance. I turned, but there was only the silent queue. I was non-plussed by the limp handshake. Not at all the type of handshake that I had expected from the Foundation Vice-Chancellor, who dictated the principles and priorities of the fledging University - a sound library as the foundation; a Great Hall, to enable town and gown to integrate; and, buildings as large as possible, to accumulate equipment as the University matured.

Inside the Hall, the tables were resplendent, but everyone was congregated in the far corner where the generous bar was located. We joined the milling throng and before long, we had met people from all sections of the University, the Library, Administration, Service Units, Friends of the University and Members of the Council.

By the Grace of Godfrey! For the first time we heard Grace, said for us all by the Professor of the Classics. It was wonderful to feel that you belonged to a University, where the colours and styles of gowns reflected academic knowledge and achievements, and where a Grace in Latin linked us with scholars and traditions of the past.

During the course of the evening, we realised why this was termed “Hail and Farewell”. The Vice-Chancellor would greet new members of staff, and farewell those who were retiring or going elsewhere. In response, a new staff member or one who was leaving, would reply. The speeches were informative and witty, two rendered completely in verse. At the end of the dinner, while we were finishing our coffee, stuffing after dinner mints in a pocket for the children, and sipping a Hunter Valley Port, we moved around greeting new acquaintances and friends, and complaining about how hot it was.

With the age of “User Pays” the numbers at the Hail and Farewell Dinners decreased. Then, when the Christmas celebration was shifted to the middle of the year, so the temperature would be more appropriate for feasting and drinking, a smaller venue became appropriate. But, Dinner in the Union did not have the majesty, nor the atmosphere, of the grand functions held in the dining room at Edwards Hall. The Hail and Farewell Dinners became a Ghost of the Past.

My Vision of the last day of the semester is similar to my experiences in recent years. I’ll certainly go down to the Union, shake hands with the Vice-Chancellor and have a drink. I’ll say “Hello” to a number of people, most of whom I don’t know, nor have a chance of knowing. I don’t think there will be too many Members of the Council there, nor Friends of the University from the City. There won’t be the beer and prawns party in Administration either, which brought together academics and administration staff, not only at the party, but also through the year.

This is to be the last year at the University for the Professor of the Classics, the longest serving Professor in the University. Some of his friends and colleagues will meet at the Staff House to toast Godfrey and the contribution he has made to his students and to the corporate life of the University of Newcastle. How I would have loved to have heard, for the last time, Godfrey’s Grace at the University Dinner, and also his address of farewell. But, times have changed. Godfrey, in the spirit of Catullus I say “Ave atque vale”.

The Vision dims.

Barry Boettcher
THE BEGINNING

The environmental history of the University can be broken up into two main themes and periods. The first is 1951 - 1964 when the University college was at Tighes Hill and could be entitled “Asphalt and Barbed Wire”. The second period is 1965 to the present at Shortland (now Callaghan). This more recent period could be entitled “Blackbutt Revisited”.

The forest on the present university site once formed part of a much larger Blackbutt forest that extended through the Jesmond area, and north almost as far as the Shortland Wetlands. From early photographs we see that sawmilling and clearing in the Jesmond area from about 1860 to 1950 cut a massive swath through the original forest. Today we have two, quite separate, areas of forest: Blackbutt and the University.

The pictures tell the story.

Dennis Rowe

In 1958 the Tighes Hill Campus still had asphalt in abundance. Students attended the graduation ceremony outdoors in an inhospitable environment.

(Photograph Courtesy University Archives)

Despite the ravaging of the natural environment outside of the University boundaries, the University planners tried hard to ensure that building programs within the University interfered as little as possible with the existing bushland. This photograph shows the construction of the Medical Science Building around 1977, with the original forest in the foreground.

(Photograph Courtesy University Archives)
BUSH REGENERATION WORKS ON CAMPUS

Following the recent restructuring of grounds operations, Marilyn (Mim) Woodland has joined the University as the Bush Regeneration Supervisor. With the active assistance of the grounds staff, regeneration and landscape development works are underway in the Hunter car park, Western Entrance, International House, Evatt House, Wetlands and internal pathworks and Reserve areas. This will take the form of spatial definition and edge treatments, aeration of soils, integrated weed reduction programmes and follow up planting. The grounds staff have begun propagation of indigenous (local) native plant species.

With ongoing refurbishment of the grounds, it is envisaged such that social forum, sculptural court areas and bush food plantings will emerge as part of these works.

The long standing commitment to the University’s bushland on the part of the Grounds Supervisor, Herb Presker, and many others, is thus likely to be fully rooted in the ongoing landscaping.

Current levels of mulch application (both ridge gravels and shredded biomass) will continue throughout the new year, with gradual integration of on campus surplus. Whilst new building site works will continue in this development phase, all resources will be utilised fully to secure healthy soils, viable habitat and a creative landscape.

Mounding and aeration of soils are envisaged for all areas designated reserve or green corridor by the University Master Plan (1990), and an input and revision of the total catchment requirements is underway. The full utilisation of water on campus, rainfall, seepage flows and wastes is sought to assist in the gradual enhancement of the plantings.

Recent plantings on Campus have included:-

- Casuarina spp
- Toona Australis (Australian Red Cedar), (by Godfrey Tanner on retirement)
- Ficus spp, and Olea (fruited olives) (by Professor and Mrs Morgan during Environment week and tennis court openings)
- Dry forest species, as well as Lomandra, Hardenbergia, Calistemon spp and indigenous Eucalypts.

The University is pleased to have recently received a Merit Award in the Lower Hunter Civic Design Awards for the Chancellery landscaping; highlighting the growing concern for environmental health and the University’s commitment to actively explore sustainable land use options.

Peter Stevens
The Present

"Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude." *

A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS' MESSAGE

When I was asked if I would provide a piece for this special issue of the Bulletin, it was suggested that it should be bright and enjoyable, visionary and related to the research of the University. It was to be a Christmas piece, and so in the meaning of Christmas these days, should carry firstly a message of cheer - preferably with a distribution of goodies for all - and secondly a message of hope.

Others are to be reflective, some to be factual. I wish I had these tasks. From the point of view of research, whether we talk about where we are now, or attempt to provide a message for the future, it will not be possible to distribute goodies, but by combined effort we may introduce a message of hope.

Within the University, amalgamation has left us in a difficult position with respect to research. On the one hand about 60% of our academic staff came from the University culture where there was an expectation of teaching, scholarship and research. About 40% of academic staff came from a CAE culture where there was no expectation of research and where teaching was perhaps more vocationally focussed. One immediate consequence of this for the larger University was a 'research quantum' which was significantly below the notional 6% in the system as a whole. Since the research quantum is intended to provide the infrastructure for research and for graduate student training, the University is obviously in trouble. Christmas presents won't come from here.

Staff appointed to the University since amalgamation now have an expectation of doing research. Again there will be no Santa Claus to fill their stocking from internally available funds.

We must look to what we can get externally. Again there is no promise of goodies. Applications for support have increased and funding available has not. The success rate in applications reaches very low levels and the chances of new and young staff without well established research records breaking into the system is small. Further infrastructure funding under dedicated external schemes must concentrate on maintaining our current success leaving little opportunity for speculation in areas of potential.

This can be seen in part in this year's success or failure in the ARC Small Grants/RMC Project Grants round. The quality of the proposals was high, across all applications. The RMC would have reasonably funded perhaps 90-95% of them. However, the low grant success in external funding pushed many experienced researchers who more usually supported externally into the internal grants scheme. Those with lesser experience in research and in grant-writing were displaced towards the lower ratings so that, in many cases, good proposals were not funded.

What then is to be done? Should those who really want to do research but are frustrated by the system give up? Or should we do what other people faced with a particular poverty do, namely to attempt to make Christmas brighter for ourselves? The academic and general staff in the University can do a lot to improve the system, but it will require a distribution of effort. The return for all is in the 'nice' things which are not tangible; e.g. basking in the esteem of the Department in general, contact with visitors from Australia and overseas, enjoyment of the vitality and exuberance which a group of active postgraduates bring to the Department. These non-material benefits can make the difference between looking forward to coming to work each morning and the Monday-depression/Friday-elation which seems to characterise so many of our work places.

What then is the sacrifice required of us all to achieve this metamorphosis? We must recognise that the Department is the living entity in a University, not the individual member of staff. Any Department can recognise the abilities of individuals and exploit them to the benefit of the Department.

The distribution of load between teaching and research is the one which is largely unrecognised in the University. So too the effort involved in excellence in postgraduate supervision goes unnoticed or unrewarded. Yet the challenge to accepted ideas so often comes from graduate students.

Those who see their prime focus as teaching should be prepared to accept higher teaching loads, in order to allow their more research-oriented colleagues to develop that aspect of the Department's contributions. Those who recognise they dabble in research or scholarship should accept additional responsibilities to allow others to enhance particular excellences. Those who are dedicated and successful researchers must still accept their responsibility to teach well, to supervise well and to enhance their Department's contribution to all aspects of their discipline. All too often one sees those whose load and commitment is not so high criticising others in their Department for the extra effort they put in, rather than accepting that benefits will flow to them as members of the Department, and hence sharing the load.

Self help of the kind suggested in a Department will foster the best in teaching, in scholarship and especially in research. The reward will not be material in form, but will be reflected in the quality of Departmental life they will enjoy. This may well be the best Christmas present any member of the Department will receive. It is important though that we do not give up. The task of re-writing an unsuccessful grant application, particularly with the referees' reports available, can in itself be stimulating and reactivate enthusiasm for a particular research project.

R.J. MacDonald
As I heard the story, Francis Webb was an Australian serviceman in Britain during World War II. He suffered from bouts of depression. It so happened that just before a northern Christmas, Francis Webb, depressed, came to see the doctor. The doctor and his wife had a baby, Christopher John, who was five days old. They left the baby with Francis. The newly-born baby in his arms just before Christmas in the darkest days of the war, helped Francis Webb out of his depression and he composed this Christmas poem.

Dom Carrigan CSSR
(Chaplain)

FIVE DAYS OLD
(For Christopher John)

Christmas is in the air,
You are given into my hands
Out of quietest, loneliest lands.
My trembling is all my prayer.
To blown straw was given
All the fullness of Heaven.

The tiny, not the immense,
Will teach our grooping eyes.
So the absorbed skies
Bleed stars of innocence.
So cloud-voice in war and trouble
Is at last Christ in the stable.

Now wonderfully engrossed
In your fearless delicacies,
I am launched upon sacred seas,
Humbly and utterly lost
In the mystery of creation,
Bells, bells of ocean.

Too pure for my tongue to praise,
That sober, exquisite yawn
Or the gradual, generous dawn
At an eyelid, maker of days:
To shrive my thought for perfection
I must breathe the old tempests of action.

For the snowflake and face of love,
Windfall and word of truth,
Honour close to death.
O eternal truthfulness, Dove,
Tell me what I hold -
Myrrh? Frankincense? Gold?

If this is man, then the danger
And fear are as lights of the inn,
Faint and remote as sin
Out here by the manger.
In the sleeping, weeping weather
We shall all kneel down together.

CHRISTMAS CHEER

I was asked for a "light-hearted, upbeat" contribution, "relatively short, in the Christmas spirit". Which, representing the dreaded Central Administration, immediately casts me in the role of a character from Dickens.

The year 1992 was another year of strong growth for the University, of continuing stresses and strains in terms of budgets and facilities and a year further on from amalgamation. Indeed, now, three years on. At the annual University Union dinner there was talk (speeches) about what a smooth amalgamation it had been and what a great University this was/is going to be.

Some with long associations with the former institutions perhaps find it hard to come to terms with the concept of a 'new' university but increasingly, I see an appreciation of the strengths and value of this very large, complex and diverse entity we call The University of Newcastle. On the administrative side, this new appreciation was perhaps typified by the enthusiasm generated by the (voluntary, of course) corporate wardrobe which is, to our knowledge, the first such wardrobe in any Australian university. This was and remains an initiative of staff, combining practicalities of cost and convenience with good spirit and style for the University.

No one year provides great leaps forward but three features of the year stand out in my mind. The first was financial soundness. In spite of all the difficulties, we have been able to maintain balanced budgets, that is, expenditure roughly equals income. It would always be easier, and more popular, to agree to the absorption of deficits. The discipline imposed by the University’s policy of balanced budgets has served us well in these difficult times while still enabling us to fund major new developments including the establishment of Law.

The second was the restoration of the landscape and the introduction of new environmentally friendly policies. Last year’s Landscape Committee put to the Vice-Chancellor that it wished this campus to be known as the best bushland campus in Australia. Such an objective seemed rather ambitious as we looked out of McMullin at the earthquake damage, builders’ trucks, debris, etc. However, considerable improvements have been achieved in a relatively short time by the team in Physical Planning and Estates Branch, and the Branch is committed to build on the enthusiasm generated by the first Campus Environment Week. Over the next two years the DEET-funded building program, combined with the $13M Pacific Power building, will top $40 million. We think we can indeed have the best of both worlds: combine this very large and much needed injection of teaching, research and academic accommodation with good environmental practice which retains the bushland character and native charm of this campus.

Thirdly, this year stands out for determined progress towards improved systems for the University. The Newcastle University Student System (NUSS) was introduced and survived well enough to go on to further improvement. Credit goes to our retiring Academic Registrar, Mr John Todd, for seeing us through this birthing.

We received and acted upon the report of the administrative computing review, prepared by consultants, Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu, and introduced the Administrative Systems Project, which is being led by Mr Bruce Cheek, Head of the University’s Department of Management. The University of Newcastle Administrative Systems Project (TUNASP) has focussed the combined energies of senior administrative staff, computing staff and importantly user analysts, as recommended by the consultants. We do expect major progress over the next two years in revamping and reforming our systems relating to Student Administration, Financial Administration, Staffing and Human Resources, and Physical Planning. We have been successful in obtaining a $143,000 grant from the Commonwealth’s Reserve Fund National Priority Projects Scheme to enable us to extend the terms of TUNASP and to improve management information systems. These developments will enable the Administration to cope better with the apparently ever expanding demands made on it by this University on the move.

Lance Hennessy
At this time when the traditional values and virtues of the ideal university appear most needed to exercise a moderating influence on society, to adjudicate its problems, to provide guidance to the best way forward, those traditional university values appear to be under vigorous attack. During 1992, policies implemented, and others foreshadowed, by Government might be viewed incongruent with the need that those in the universities exercise their traditional role of being the movers and shakers of society. Now, perhaps more than ever, there is great need of an independent voice on the propriety and worthiness of current activities of government, business, educational institutions, the churches, and the community at large.

But the paradox may be more apparent, than real. Being the movers and shakers of society requires the exercise of academic freedom - the freedom to enquire into and responsibly express informed opinion on the current state-of-play. That freedom entails academic independence, an independence to pursue unpopular lines of enquiry and to profess unpopular evaluations and unconventional conclusions, the independence to promote unpopular solutions without fear and without favour. On the face of it the increasing pressure upon the universities to recruit students from specific groups of society, to give priority to particular areas of study, to meet market demands for particular courses, to give priority to research into specific problems, and to interact more with industry and commerce in both teaching and research, appear threatening to the maintenance of academic independence. Increasing intrusion by way of professional accreditation specifications strengthen the apparent threat, for those specifications compete with our perceptions of the particular ideas and research output to which students ought to be exposed. Increasing pressure on universities to engage in fund-raising, to extract funds from industry and commerce directly by way of endowed Chairs and commissions to undertake directed research and consultancies, are now part of a familiar pattern of external pressures upon university governance.

Speculation on the underlying motives for those events is probably a waste of time. No doubt, like most social change, they arise from the interplay of a vast range of idiosyncratic goals and objectives, values and obsessions, long-range strategies and pragmatic knee-jerks to contemporary events. What we are faced with are merely the current survivors of the latest batch of fads. Possibly, many will not survive long. Some may be replaced with others with which we are even less comfortable.

Perversely, most of the current pressures universities face can be used effectively to pursue traditional university values. Specification of priorities, recourse to market demands, have renewed the resolve to retain those traditional university activities which temporarily conflict with current tastes. It also has reinforced the reality that the enjoyment of a measure of academic independence entails the obligation to society at large to deliver quality education, to produce graduates who can meet community needs. Pressure to raise some of our funding ourselves, can enhance the prospect of sufficient financial independence to pursue activities not supported by the market. The compulsory pursuit of closer links with industry and commerce can bring greater vigilance, than from the ad hoc procedures of the past, of the need to ensure that academic independence is not eroded, whilst enjoying the benefit of greater respect from our collaborators for all our activities. Increasing accreditation prescriptions have the potential to encourage much closer enquiry into what the professions consider the critical competencies, and provide a platform from which we might launch active campaigns to influence professional standards. The credit transfer and competencies movements engender introspection regarding what we teach relative to what is taught elsewhere and relative to the skills that can be acquired elsewhere. Importantly, those movements have renewed awareness that the capacity to discriminate objectively is the critical skill which universities have an almost unique capacity to pursue through their academic programs. The unified system has brought additional disciplines into the universities. The creative arts, in particular, inject the university with the essential elements of humaneness which enhance the necessary sensitivity and tolerance without which the academic ideal is certain to founder.

1992 has not been an easy year. 1993 promises to be equally difficult. But tight budgets, additional demands by government, perceived erosion of the academic ideal, are not new to universities. Curiously, whilst the present state-of-affairs threatens changes likely to offend many of us, the prevailing uncertainty, the virtual absence of coordination attending the various external pressures upon us, offer considerable scope to effect more changes compatible with the traditional university ideals and values than in conflict with them.

Frank L Clarke

"Ghost of the future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"
THE FUTURE OF GRADUATE BODIES

There has been a dramatic change in recent years in the attitudes of our nation's universities towards the role of the graduate body with graduates now seen as important sources of financial, community and political support. The need to make greater use of graduates for support will become even greater as Government funds continue to dry up for building expansion and research. Full time Convocation and Development Officers are now recognised as playing important roles in universities across the country.

The cynics among us will suggest that the fund raising track record of university graduate bodies in this country has been anything but spectacular. Certainly, convocations and alumni have had some success but compared with the American experience, our efforts have been drops in the ocean.

Professor Don Aitkin, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, gave some answers at a conference of the Australian University Graduates Council in Melbourne in October and his points are well worth recording. He suggested two sets of factors for this slow graduate response: societal and institutional.

Of the societal factors, he sees that we lack an Australian tradition of philanthropy partly because of the "relatively even distribution of income that seems to have been true for most of our 200 years."

"We have not had many very wealthy families, and although there have been some fine examples of philanthropy with respect to universities, it is probably true that universities have benefited no more than other parts of Australian society, and certainly less than hospitals and medical research," Professor Aitkin said.

There is also the "widespread perception that universities are publicly funded institutions" and that the average Australian approached to give money to a university is likely to say they have already made a donation through taxation.

The third societal factor is "an overwhelmingly instrumental perception of the nature and purpose of higher education." Most students see the purpose of university as providing them with a certificate to a better job and a better life, a tendency that is stronger here than in Britain, the US or Canada.

Professor Aitkin argues that these three factors are made more powerful by the fact that most Australian students live at home while they attend university. The experience of university is greatly enhanced if one lives it rather than travel to it every day.

The fifth and final societal factor is that universities are not major players in the society outside. "Australia has not been famous for clashes between 'town' and 'gown'," and on the whole, Australian society has tended to regard universities and students with a kind of tolerant contempt," he said.

Among the "institutional factors" is the "widespread belief among those who work in universities that because universities are essentially virtuous places, those who graduate from them should feel generous and grateful for the experiences they have had." Of course the truth is that the vast majority of students feel neither generous nor grateful when they get their degrees. For many graduates, university was "an experience they survived".

Professor Aitkin concludes that societal factors are the more important in explaining the differences between the results obtained from graduates in the US and those in this country. The societal factors work in favour of alumni links in the US and against them in Australia.

He correctly asserts therefore that to build strong bridges to our graduates we should pay more attention to the institutional factors and especially to the quality of the experience our students have as they study.

Better teaching and less attention to the honours students and post graduates could also be steps in the right direction. The great majority of our graduates are those who were relatively undistinguished while they were with us.

I am not suggesting that universities do not have fine teachers who have the welfare of their students at heart and give much more than they get back from their audiences. There are many such people on our campus and on campuses throughout our nation. But I am suggesting that research does sometimes take precedence over teaching and that the better teaching staff are we able to produce the happier most students will be.

Vic Levi

CHRISTMAS 2004....

Stage One of the Manning Campus outside Taree has recently been completed. Following the introduction of a regional quota system, academics on the Campus recover over Christmas from a savage enrolment-poaching war with the University of Eastern Australian's Packer Campus at Port Macquarie...

On the Central Coast Campus, a pollution-free system of transport by electric cars within the perimeter has long been in operation. It is now being reevaluated, following the spectacular breakdown of the vehicle carrying the Chancellor and the Premier to the official opening of Stage Three...

Meanwhile back on Callaghan, many academics are taking a break from the sixth year of the intensive summer school Distinction program, providing gifted and talented Senior College students with the opportunity to take 100 level in subjects which they have completed at HSC level during year 11. Enrolments in Economics have declined slightly from the peak of 620...

The external studies program has caused heated debate during the academic year. The University of Newcastle was split by Council's decision in July that this institution should become the ninth Australian University to provide a national Open Learning network, teaching on a dedicated television channel under the program instituted by the Crean Labor government, in which neither fees nor entry requirements are mandatory...

Recovering from these and other developments, the combined Staff Club and Student Union held its seventh annual interactive video disco party on the 24th, joining the three established campuses (and the two conservatoriums) together by the normal satellite linkup, and celebrating the introduction of the required technology into the Union Bar of the new Upper Hunter Campus (temporarily located in the Muswellbrook RSL Auditorium)...

Michael Ewans
SUBSERVIENCE OR ASCENDANCY?
The role of science communication in the fate of Australia

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat and we must take the current where it serves -or lose our venture."

No more perceptive warning could summarise the plight of Australia as it prepares to enter the 21st century. $150 billion in debt to overseas lenders, a million out of work, a steady loss of $2 million every hour on the balance of trade. To say that such a condition is unsustainable understates the case.

The paradox of our condition is that we lie on the edge of the world's most economically dynamic region - where the annual rate of economic growth, averaged, is three times that of Australia. In places like southern China they are growing eight times faster than us. Equally paradoxical, it would seem, is how a country which is intrinsically wealthy in natural resources can become so very impoverished, both economically and in terms of its ability to manage its affairs.

Let me outline very clearly what the next quarter of a century, or so, holds for us. Living standards and wages will fall, but that is the least of our worries. Unemployment will remain constantly high, but that too is a small ill. There will be a cycle of modest upturns followed by increasingly deep recessions.

As Australians become poorer and poorer, they become less able to afford to own and live in their own country. As other nationalities become more affluent they can more readily afford to own it. Piece by piece, investment by investment, our farms, factories, homes, businesses, cities and industries will pass out of Australian hands and into those of overseas owners. I say this as a matter of fact. The inevitable consequences of such a progression is that slowly but surely first our economic power and then the political power over this country will pass into the hands of others. We will have forfeited our sovereignty and surrendered our right, as a free country, to direct our own destiny.

It is an interesting reflection that most of the nations which find themselves in economic chaos today have achieved it through the action of incompetence of some maligned dictatorship. Australians, on the other hand, have achieved it of their own free will.

They have crushed and hobbled their industries of natural comparative advantage. They have protected and subsidised the industrial basket cases. They have erected a mountain of red-tape, bureaucracy and over-regulation of which the now-defunct communist powers would have been proud. And they have invested vast sums in grotesquely unproductive activity such as real estate, public administration, gambling and other non-wealth creating pursuits.

Today Australia invests $6 billion on horses and dogs every year. Using even the most generous definition it invests barely one third of that in science and technology, and more like one sixth.

Science is the fountainhead of our national comparative advantage in agriculture, food, mining, telecommunications, industry - and we think it is six times less important than backing the next loser at Flemington.

The national disease of backing losers is not confined, it seems, to the race track, but is also epidemic in our boardrooms and financial institutions. To feed our appetites for a living standard we can no longer afford, we must go ever deeper into debt, and a national debt as you may be aware is the worst form of child abuse. It is robbing the nation's future to pay for its spendthrift past.

There is only one way that Australia can reverse this dreadful tide that is engulfing it. It is not by any realignment of the political and economic deckchairs, but rather we have to change the course of the entire ship, and that includes the attitudes and values of its captains, crew and passengers. The only answer is to regenerate our industries, build dynamic new ones, diversify our economy, add value to our goods and services, go out and physically graft ourselves into the Asian economic miracle.

We certainly cannot achieve it by sitting complacently here and hoping to plunder a few rich tourists as they pass through. The Japanese have already forestalled that one by buying up the souvenir shops, hotels and golf links.

Throughout human history, successful, dominant societies have been defined by their technology and the way they used it. Weak, unsuccessful and subservient societies have been defined by their lack of it. That, in a nutshell, is Australia's choice as it enters the 21st century. But the true dilemma we face is that, despite our strong scientific core, as a nation we are disinterested in technology.

We are reluctant to use it in our daily lives, to acquire new skills. The "clever country" was always fated to be stillborn because Australians do not see themselves as clever. It is an unAustralian trait. As a nation we do not understand cleverness. We fear and despise it. We feel threatened by it. We are resistant to the march of new technology, reluctant to accept it.

Proof of this assertion is everywhere. Look how the workforce, through the union movement, has bitterly opposed the introduction of new technology which alters age-old work practices. Look how old folk are confused by computerised phones, banks, government services. Look how young Australians resent and despise science and its practitioners. Look how bureaucrats, politicians and journalists disparage and discount it.

Between 1975 and 1990, when the fastest growing industry in 10 top OECD countries was computers, in Australia it was real estate. We rank ahead only of Argentina as an exporter of technology. We train half the number of engineers and scientists, per capita, of any emerging Asian nation. Of our 15,000 companies 2 out of 3 use no form of advanced technology whatsoever in their operations. Of almost 500 directors on the boards of our top 50 companies, only 2 have technology backgrounds and responsibilities.

Further evidence lies in a survey done for DITAC and entitled "An evaluation of the attitudes of Australians to Science and Technology" - the Woolcott report.

This tells us: YOUNG Australians see scientists as nerds and losers W0MEN feel fearful and threatened by the changes they perceive science as inflicting on them PARENTS are disappointed if their kids become scientists and some actively discourage it BUSINESS leaders think the "Clever Country" is empty rhetoric.

If you have ever wondered why this country is becoming poorer and poorer while all around are becoming wealthier and wealthier, one need not seek much further for an answer. We are a poor country because we shun the future. We have a degraded environment and ruined waterways because we take no account
of the long-term consequences of our actions and have never bothered even to understand the land in which we live. If we are to reverse this process of national impoverishment, there is a mighty communications task ahead of us.

Humans are a communicating animal. Without the extraordinary ability to exchange thoughts, concepts and ideas, no developments or technologies would have emerged. When archaeologists talk of a stone tool tradition, they mean not only the style and method of manufacture of the tools, but also the process by which knowledge to make those tools was transferred from one individual or generation to the next.

The habit of communicating about technology is thus at least 2.2 million years old, immeasurably more ancient than prostitution. So when it is suggested that scientists also be good communicators, it is asking them to carry out an important part of their professional responsibilities. Having developed a technology, some effort is required to bring it to the notice of would-be users and beneficiaries. Otherwise the research may be in vain.

Unfortunately, and perhaps because so much of scientific progress is bound up with military or commercial secrecy, the habit of communicating with the wider society is not ingrained in scientists. Indeed I know of no undergraduate science course in Australia which includes communication as a standard requirement, and so far only a handful of postgraduate courses, which naturally cater to the converted.

People in many societies, our own in particular, are afraid of science, not only because it produces atomic bombs and cancer-causing chemicals, but because it produces something far, far worse: change. People are just as frightened by autotellers, computers and robots which steal their work and their discoveries, they have forgotten to explain them to the society that pays their miserable wages. They have omitted to put their work in language that ordinary people can understand. They have failed to explain its relevance to our daily lives - our health, wealth and wellbeing as a nation - and how to put it into practice in our industries.

The scientific communications job in Australia has been botched and as a result the political hounds have thundered off in full cry after other priorities. The penalty for this was a decade of cuts, lost talent and lost opportunity in Australian science. It can still be seen in the demoralised and scandalously under-resourced conditions in our universities. It will take far more than a decade to rectify and especially, to win back Australia’s brightest youth to the profession of research.

We have lost 20 years on the rest of the world. To calculate the personal cost, look in your home and workplace, look on any farm and ask how much equipment was made here in Australia, how much-created jobs here or overseas? How much less might you have paid if it had been made by a competitive industry here? How much have we, as a nation, gone into debt simply to buy the basic technology we need to run our businesses and lives from other, cleverer, countries?

The penalties for not communicating with society and industry about the products and progress of science and technology exact a very high price indeed, one that generations of Australians yet unborn will have the privilege of repaying.

The farmer who does not plough his field can expect a crop of weeds. The scientific sector which does not work up the fallow ground of public interest and industry awareness, cannot expect its inventions and discoveries to flourish, but rather to be choked by a conflicting mass of alternative technologies and misconceptions. Australia can no longer afford to have its science effort operate in isolation from the society it serves. It can no longer afford scientists who are reluctant or incapable of making some effort to transfer their research results to industry and the community.

We need to ensure that from now on every scientist, engineer and technologist who is trained in Australia is equipped with at least some basic communication skills and an understanding of why it is important to communicate.

We need to examine the modus operandi of our universities in publicising their research activities. I can sum up the present situation in the following phrase: too much boasting about the big grants we got and not enough explaining the results we obtained. The Australian public, Australian industry and the Australian community is not in the slightest bit interested in how much money a certain researcher or team received from the ARC. But they may well be interested in what was discovered with it and how that discovery is liable to influence their lives and industries.

As a long-time agricultural journalist I quickly learned that the worst term of abuse a farmer can possibly level at someone is to call them an academic. To say they are a useless person is, in the rural cannon of contumely, a milder insult. The reason is that farmers, like many Australians, have the idea that academics don’t do an awful lot that is practical or useful. This perception is fed by the fact that the academic community has not taken too much trouble to communicate its relevance to the wider population.

It is time that our universities, our science agencies and research bodies began to take this issue of communication a lot more seriously. It is time to start giving the shareholders, the people of Australia, a greater sense that they are getting value for their research dollar. To deliver Australia from a potentially miserable future of dwindling wealth and falling living standards, we need to change the national culture. Nothing less.

It is no use science blaming business, or business blaming science when their ideas do not fit together. If neither has bothered to communicate, that outcome is inevitable. It is no use universities saying they are overcrowded, underfunded and falling to bits, if they haven’t communicated their value to the vast majority of Australians who have never and will never attend one. It is no use the research community blaming governments because they haven’t enough funds, equipment or bright new students coming through if they haven’t bothered to explain, in simple terms, what they are doing to create a better national future.

Communication lies at the root of all of these problems. Bad communication will perpetuate them and good communication will overcome them.

The academic and scientific community often prides itself on being the intellectual cream of the country and on its capacity for vision and leadership. I challenge it to do so by communicating far more effectively than ever in its history the solutions to our national plight.

Julian Cribb  
Science and Technology Writer  
The Australian Newspaper  
Winner of Michael Daley Award for Science Writing
"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

* From Charles Dickens - "A Christmas Carol" Oxford University Press