

Introductory Remarks

John Stone

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this, the fifteenth Conference of The Samuel Griffith Society, and our second in Adelaide, where once again we have benefited from the enthusiasm and hard work of our South Australian member of the Board of Management, Mr Bob Day. May I take this opportunity of congratulating Bob, on behalf of all the members of the Society, on his award in this year's Australia Day Honours List, as an Officer (AO) in the Order of Australia.

Members of the Society will be aware that our previous Conference, in Sydney last June, was honoured with an Address to the opening Dinner by the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, the Hon Murray Gleeson, AC. Those of you who were present at last night's Dinner will have heard, similarly, the lively address by another member of the High Court bench, Mr Justice Ian Callinan, AC. I note in passing that Mr Justice Callinan has addressed us earlier, at our fourth Conference in Brisbane in 1994, in his then capacity as plain Mr Callinan, QC. I will say only that his address last night, with its deft admixture of his twin skills both as a jurist and a novelist/playright, fully lived up to the high expectations which that earlier precedent had generated.

I suppose that it might be stretching things to suggest that being addressed by members of the High Court on two successive occasions had now created a tradition. Still, it's a thought to conjure with .
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In the day and a half before us we have in prospect ten papers and another Dinner Address – in that case by Senator the Hon Nick Minchin, himself a distinguished South Australian and, if I may presume to say so, one of the most competent members of the present Government in his current role as Minister for Finance. His Address on *Voluntary Voting* will, I am sure, be as lively as it will be thought provoking.

It is a coincidence that we should be meeting at this time in Adelaide where, a few months hence, the Government will be convening a Constitutional Convention. Our first four papers today all have to do with that Convention, in the initiation of which, it is proper to note, one of the Society's own members, the Hon Peter Lewis, MHA (now Speaker of the SA House of Assembly) played a dominant role. Of course, the two papers dealing with Citizen Initiated Referendums relate not only to the forthcoming South Australian Convention, but also bear on the more general question of the possible use of that device to restore a greater level of democratic participation to our parliamentary processes in Australia more generally.

This afternoon, apart from the paper by our President, Sir Harry Gibbs, on the *Teob Case*, we shall have papers from Professor Peter Howell and Professor Philip Ayres, each dealing with the topics of their recently published books, *South Australia and Federation* and *Owen Dixon*, respectively. Tomorrow, apart from the report by Julian Leeser on the state of the Republic debate as evidenced by the conference at Griffith University last November, we shall hear papers from Dr Geoffrey Partington and Keith Windschuttle.

Dr Partington will lay out in some detail the process of fabrication of Aboriginal mythology as evinced in the notorious Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, while Keith Windschuttle will close our Conference with his paper on *Mabo and the Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. The latter's recent enormously successful book, dealing with the historical fabrication process within the History departments of some of our major Universities, has already indicated the sources of the crude historical distortions from which,

none the less, six Justices of the High Court in 1992 chose to draw their judicial inspiration in the *Mabo Case*. Mr Windschuttle's paper should ensure that our Conference ends, to adapt T S Elliott, not with a whimper but a bang.

To return, however, to our immediate proceedings, we begin today with two papers assessing the work leading up to next month's South Australian Constitutional Convention – each of them from a participant in the Group of Experts appointed by the South Australian government to assist in that process. The first of these papers will be delivered by the Hon Len King, AC, previously Chief Justice of South Australia (and prior to that, Attorney-General in the Labor government of that time), and the second by the Hon Trevor Griffin, who recently retired as Attorney-General in the then outgoing Liberal Party administration. The session will be chaired by Mr Bob Day, to whom I now hand over.