

## Introductory Remarks

John Stone

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this, the 20<sup>th</sup> Conference of The Samuel Griffith Society.

Yesterday, in the course of doing all the other things she does in preparing for these Conferences, my wife dug out the Minutes Book containing the records of the first meetings of the Society's Board of Management. Over the months following the Society's incorporation in early January, 1992 I had written letters to about 900 people advising them of its formation and its purposes, and inviting them to become members. On 15 May, 1992 the Board met for the first time and dealt with 19 applications for membership. Some 13 of those then admitted are still members, and three of them were here last night – Charles Copeman, Derek Fowler and Joe Newton.

When the board met again a fortnight later, it dealt with another 95 applications for membership, including one from a prominent Queensland barrister, Mr Ian Callinan, QC – of whom, more later.

A week later again, the Board dealt with a further 69 applications for membership, of whom four were present last night – Noel Crichton-Brown, Jill Evans, Juliet Kirkpatrick and John Paul.

I could go on, but all I am trying to say is that, in its own small way, this Society has generated remarkable loyalties that have lasted down the years.

Of course, it has not all been smooth sailing. Even at our first Conference in the Hilton Hotel, Melbourne in July, 1992 we were being assailed by the usual ignorant – and worse still, politically tainted – journalists as “another right-wing organisation”. We have survived that kind of malice, and today our bookshelves – and our website – proudly display the Proceedings of our previous 19 Conferences.

Last night we were privileged to be addressed by that same Queensland barrister, now the Honourable Ian Callinan, AC – that's Callinan with a capital C, you understand – on the topic *Superior Courts in the Republic of Australia*. Not only were we honoured by Mr Callinan's presence, in his new capacity as Vice-President of the Society, but we were also treated to a feast of ideas, robustly framed and, as always, equally robustly delivered. I am sure that, when the Proceedings of this Conference are published, his address will read as well as it sounded last night, and stimulate as much further thought.

Since our last Conference, much has happened. In particular, we have a new government in Canberra, which seems bent on re-starting the same old Republican nag that was left floundering in the run to the referendum post in 1999. Professor David Flint, who as well as being a member of our Board of Management is also the National Convenor of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy, will be addressing us on that topic over dinner this evening, so I shall say no more about it here.

Before we come to Professor Flint this evening, however, we have today a rich and varied bill of fare before us, and tomorrow morning we shall have three further papers focusing on federalism issues today both in Australia and the United States. So as usual at these Conferences, we shall not lack for intellectual sustenance.

Our program this morning begins with a session entitled *Undermining Australia's Federalism: The High Court at Work*. We have two papers directed to the federal nature of our Constitution, both as to its original intent and as to the distortions of that intent at the hands of successive centralist High Court benches. The first of those papers is to be given by Dr Nicholas Aroney, and as I am chairing this opening session I shall now move on to introducing him.