

Vigilant in defence

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW, the most admired woman in Australian public life, became the University of Sydney's seventeenth Chancellor in July. She had this to say:

"Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor, members of the Senate of the University of Sydney, academic colleagues, distinguished guests, friends and family.

"Thank you Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Chancellor for the warmth and generosity of your words of welcome. Indeed I thank each one of you in this Great Hall who has honoured me by your presence here tonight.

"It is indeed a most singular privilege to be called upon to serve this renowned institution which has been integral to my very being since childhood, so richly contributory to my intellectual and emotional development across a lifetime.

"As I noted at the ceremony which conferred upon me in 2002 an Honorary Doctorate of Medicine, 'There is no occasion when one enters this Great Hall as a former student or academic, that an awesome sense of history is not evoked. But also an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the culture of learning and reflection, for the pathway to intellectual riches – and the inspiration towards enlightenment abounding, which it symbolises.

"One recalls the vision and courage of our early founders, including William Charles Wentworth, whose statue greets us as we enter this Hall.

"Wentworth, appointed by my great predecessor, the fifth Governor of New South Wales Lachlan Macquarie, to the position of Acting Provost Marshal in the colony at the age of twenty-one, set the direction which the future University would take.

"And as our University history records, it would espouse 'an unfettered

means to higher learning, open to all classes and to all denominations and under the auspices of the state'.

"Across 157 years of achievement, this philosophy - this model of equity and idealism - has served our nation well.

"As a graduate in Medicine, I am grateful also for the considerable legacy of excellence which has followed the establishment of that faculty from 1856 and which has continued to this day. Nevertheless, despite the rich and abundant gifts of the past, there are contemporary - and future - serious challenges which must now be foremost in my mind.

"I have no illusions regarding their complexity, nor can I deny the confronting and conflicting elements which can arise in the highly competitive environment which faces Australian universities today.

"But you have my assurance that I shall do my utmost to contribute to the continuing advancement of this University, and to its ever increasing value to the wider community and to the nation.

"I wish to be vigilant in defending, as far as possible, the genuine autonomy of the University of Sydney, to ensure the continuation of an environment in which independent, innovative and courageous debate and endeavour will flourish.

"Indeed, an academic colleague has alerted me to a highly charged comment of the current Chancellor of Oxford University (a former Minister for Education) who declared 'a university is not a branch office of a Ministry of Education. Universities are extremely important parts of a plural society. Their independence is crucial'.

"I want to remain empathic to the wellbeing of our students from wherever they hail, and to share the aspirations and striving for excellence of the academic

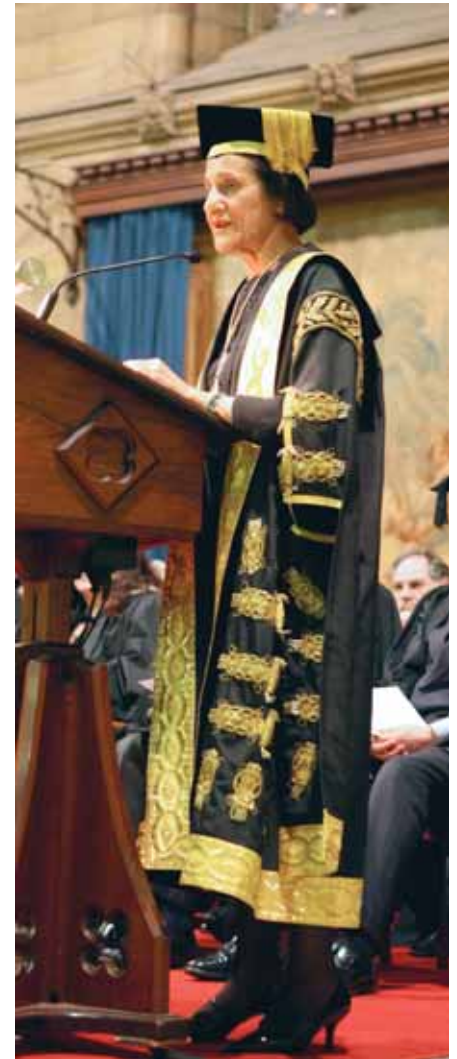


photo: Ted Seally

Marie Bashir: vision and courage

staff – indeed of the whole University community.

"I look forward to contributing my enthusiastic support to the Vice-Chancellor and his team in attracting and nurturing our international students, who will go on to serve their respective nations, and indeed the world, with distinction and humanity, and forever remain proud of their connection with their Australian alma mater.

"It will be important also to build on the positive relationship which this senior University has always valued with the wider community, so that the >

community has a sense of connectedness with our institution, from the corporate and business world to the very young children just beyond this campus of the Darlington Public School and Chippendale, who use our grounds.

“There is much cause for pride in the progress which our University has made in establishing vigorous and prestigious programs which reach out to our indigenous students.

“It is my wish – and belief – that these will go from strength to strength.

“We are blessed indeed that this University since its inception has been

sensitive to the value of cultural activities beyond the lecture theatre and even our very eminent research foundations.

“It has been fortunate not only in its outstanding sporting tradition – the first rugby club in Australia, after all – but in its extraordinarily rich tradition within its museums, and in drama and music.

“All of these have enriched the lives of graduates, undergraduates and alumni. They will have my continuing gratitude and support.

“I am proud to follow in the footsteps of my esteemed predecessor the Honourable Kim Santow, and I am

deeply appreciative of his contribution to this University and indeed, in his confidence in me.

“I am also very much aware of the important advantages, and the pleasure which I shall have, in working with our outstanding Vice-Chancellor and his academic team, with the Registrar, the highly committed Senate, and our exceptional academic community.

“And finally, may I thank my family – those who directed me in my formative years – and those today, for their endless patience and generosity, and the loyal friends who inspire me in all my endeavours.” ■

Caloo calay, 0 frabjous day!

Eagle-eyed readers of the Winter issue of SAM may recall reading something about the forthcoming Medieval Christmas Banquet and wondering what it might be about.

The answer is: one of the most convivial ways of raising funds for good causes ever devised. The Sydney Chancellor’s Committee was started by Sir Hermann Black in 1977 specifically to come up with painless methods of fund-raising within the University community, for its various projects (funding bursaries for Koori students via the Koori Centre, for instance; restoration of artworks, stonework and other important artefacts owned by the University).

Thirty years on, today’s committee members continue to dream up events for alumni and guests to gather, and in December, it’s the Medieval Christmas Banquet.

The celebrations begin in the Quadrangle with First Remove (aka Entrée) and drinks (don’t worry, mead will not be served) while guests enjoy demonstrations by the Sydney University Anachronists of medieval sport and entertainment and, courtesy Sydney University Surcus, other activities common to the snood-and wimple-wearing times. These include juggling, fire twirling and wandering minstrels. (MacLaurin Hall is on stand-by in case of inclement weather.)

When the knights have whacked the living daylights out of each other with broadswords and other contemporary



photo: Getty Images

Medieval tucker: pies as well as rosyd samon and dere

weaponry, guests, known as (take a deep breath) Our Noble Cousins and Comrades in Arms from the Fields of Body, Mind and Soul, will process behind designated Standard Bearers to the Great Hall. The Chancellor, HE Professor Marie Bashir, AC CVO, Governor of NSW, known on this occasion as The Most Gracious Lady, Noble Guest and Honoured Patron, together with the Vice-Chancellor (aka Our Most Chivalrous and Noble Lord of the Feast) and their gallant and fair spouses, will then be heralded into the Great Hall to the High Table by those fellows who wear tabards and play impossibly long trumpets.

Although larks’ tongues and roast swan are not on the menu, some research

has been carried out into the kinds of delicacies from 500 years ago that might tickle the fancy of modern Australians. For instance, Samon rosyd in wine sause; cameline of lamb, dere or hye grece rosyd with frumentye – and so on. The wine list is definitely contemporary, organisers promise.

During the banquet the Sydney University Madrigal Choir will entertain with the top hits of the period, while the jugglers and minstrels will continue to do their thing as they stroll around the tables. ■

A Registration Form comes with this edition of SAM, so book now for an unforgettable night of Medievalry.