

No summary of John Lockhart's life story would be complete without reference to his enduring love of art. He was not just a collector of paintings judged by him to be worthy of collection; he gave tangible support to Australian artists trying to emerge from the ruck of obscurity. While holding office as minister for the arts, Bob Ellicott appointed him to the Art Exhibitions Australia Board, a body designed to promote the display in Australia of significant foreign works of art.

I have picked some highlights of a stellar career dedicated, since 1978, almost exclusively to public service. He was in truth an all-rounder whose character was the amalgam of a profusion of remarkable qualities – all of them good: social grace without pretension, cheerful good humour, a capacity to exert authority without pomposity, to name just a few. Speaking for myself, I say that I never spent time in his company without feeling better for it.

John and I once, and quite recently, discussed religion. He expressed himself paradoxically. He said: 'I think I'm an agnostic Anglican'. He was explaining that he had doubts about faith, thereby declaring himself a member of a club with many members, including St Augustine, who, even after his conversion, prayed to God to help his unbelief. Even saints – and many of them – have been plagued with such doubts about their faith. But, if any person was ready to meet his Maker because of an exemplary life, that person was John Lockhart. We can say 'May he rest in peace' with confidence that he has already attained that state. His favourite musical work was 'St Matthew's Passion'. Of him let us say, in the words attributed to Christ in the gospel of that apostle: 'Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of Our Lord.'

BOOK REVIEWS

Passing The Torch

By Peter Gray SC (editor) | Aisling Society, 2005

Passing the Torch, an idiosyncratic selection of 50 years of talks to the Aisling (Irish for a vision or dream) Society of Sydney is not manifestly of general interest to lawyers. However, this 'book of talks', edited by Peter Gray SC, provides further evidence of the attraction of the practice of the law to the 'romantic character of the Celt'.

The 'love of language, the lawyer's tools of trade, and the fascination of concepts and ideals are qualities to be found in the Irish temperament', Sir Gerard Brennan told the Aisling Society in a 1989 talk highlighting common bonds of law between Australia and Ireland – especially involving people: chief justice of the High Court Sir Frank Gavan Duffy, NSW chief justices Sir James Martin and Sir Frederick Darley, and barristers Roger Therry and John Hubert Plunkett, NSW attorney general from 1836 to 1856, who prosecuted to conviction the perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre of 28 Aboriginal men, women and children.

As a 1992 speaker to the society related, after the jury in a trial before Chief Justice Dowling, had found 11 men not guilty of murder in relation to one Myall Creek death, Plunkett had seven of them rearrested as they left the court and arraigned to appear in relation to the deaths of two children. Before a different judge, they were found guilty and hanged. 'From then on, Plunkett was

hated by the majority of the squatter class and other white settlers', received numerous death threats and 'was subjected to a vicious campaign of slander and vilification'.

In March 2002, Justice Michael Kirby (family derived 'with perfect neutrality' from both communities of Ireland) at the end of 'a not always lovely week',¹ recalled successful European Court of Human Rights challenges by 'two very difficult Irishmen' to laws against homosexuals: *Dudgeon v United Kingdom* (1981) 4 EHRR 149 and *Norris v Ireland* (1989) 13 EHRR 186.

'We can learn from heroes such as Geoffrey Dudgeon and David Norris', Justice Kirby concluded. 'They refused to accept humiliation, injustice, oppression and inequality. Ultimately by courage, integrity and persistence they secured reform of the law not only for themselves but for all of their fellow citizens and for generations yet to come'.

Reviewed by John Mancy

¹ The events of which are described in *E Campbell and M Groves 'Attacks on judges under parliamentary privilege: a sorry Australian episode' [2002] Public Law 626*.