

## Tony Richard Edwards (1954-2014)



Tony Richard Edwards of Newcastle Chambers died suddenly of a heart attack on 21 June 2014, aged 60.

Tony was a well known and proud Novocastrian, having lived in Newcastle all his life. The eldest child of Don and Gloria Edwards (Don sadly passed away very shortly after Tony's death), Tony attended Newcastle Boys High School before commencing his legal career with Bruce O'Sullivan, Fox & Walsh under the tutelage of Max Fox, with whom he developed a close personal, professional and sporting association. Indeed, Max's daughter introduced Tony to his wife, Judy.

Tony was quickly appointed a partner in Bruce O'Sullivan, Fox & Walsh and remained a partner until going to the bar in 1991. Whilst Tony's achievements as a solicitor might now be a distant memory, there is a permanent reminder of Tony in the District Court at Newcastle. On one occasion in his younger days (appearing against no lesser advocate than that other well known Novocastrian, Larry King SC), Tony was appearing in the District Court when a customer of the court, who had recently been sentenced by the judge,

barged into the court brandishing an implement said to be an axe and moved towards the judge. Without regard for his own safety, Tony crash tackled the offender, colliding heavily with the old fireplace in the court cracking it in the middle. The cracked fireplace still sits in the District Court as a reminder of the days before security in the court and now of one of Newcastle's most determined advocates, in more ways than one.

At the bar he developed a varied practice with an emphasis on personal injury work or perhaps more accurately an emphasis on representing workers in a wide range of legal issues. In tributes to him in the *Newcastle Herald* after his death he was described as a fierce advocate for his clients. He knew how to achieve a result in even the most difficult cases and was often heard to say that sometimes it is necessary to save clients from themselves. He was prepared to represent all and any who sought his expertise and there are many workers in the Newcastle and country areas who benefited from his determined approach to obtaining a favourable result for them.

He spent five years representing one such client in various jurisdictions, including defending criminal proceedings, applying for reinstatement in industrial proceedings, pursuing appeals all the way to the leave stage of the High Court and finally seeking compensation. That client was there at his funeral at the overflowing Newcastle Cathedral.

He was held in high regard and liked by not only his clients but also by those insurers and their representatives with whom he regularly battled. Typical of Tony, he was last seen in the Workers Compensation Commission in Sydney two days before he died placing the solicitor for the insurer in a headlock demanding that he pay more money to his client. The WCC was reported to be a sombre place on the Monday after his death.

In his last ten years at the bar, Tony became one of the counsel of choice for the New South Wales Police Association, particularly representing police officers seeking benefits for total and permanent disablement.

Tony had a keen intellect and an expansive mind. This was also demonstrated most recently in his unfinished attempts to argue and overcome complex legal problems relating to jurisdiction and the use of declaratory powers in the IRC for the benefit of a group of police officers seeking payment of TPD Benefits from the relevant trustee and insurer. He did not shy from pursuing complex legal arguments or appearing in difficult cases. Perhaps typical of the requirements of barristers practising in regional areas, he liked to say if there's a book about it then I'm an expert in it.' Of course as his colleagues in chambers have informed

## OBITUARIES

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me he went out of his way to undersell his legal ability and expertise. He never needed to or liked to extoll his own virtues.

Tony spent many years as a member of Newcastle Chambers. He used to tell me of the advantages of working in Newcastle and his chambers and in particular the support he received from his staff as well as his colleagues such as Harben SC who emphasises the assistance and support he and other members of the chambers received from Tony over many years.

While Tony worked hard, his work might be best described as a sideline to his main interests which were his wife Judy, his children and in recent years, his grandchildren, and all things associated with sport. Tony was an accomplished soccer and basketball player but his main talent was on the cricket field. He played First Grade for Northern Districts and also played representative cricket, including representing Northern New South Wales against the West Indies and England. He played county cricket in England. He was part of a New South Wales country team which included cricketers such as Gary Gilmore and Bob Holland. There may not be another non-test wicket keeper who can claim to have

stumped Viv Richards, Alvin Kallicharan and Colin Cowdrey in representative games.

In the match against the West Indies, which included many famous names in the West Indies Team, he scored 81 of a total of 162 in the second innings.

After retiring from cricket, Tony spent a considerable time on a voluntary basis as a cricket and basketball administrator, as well as often providing advice on a voluntary basis to sports people and sporting teams. He served on the Newcastle Cricket Association Judiciary. He also represented A-League soccer players in disciplinary proceedings. He was always generous with his time and money in supporting so many voluntary and indeed professional associations. His passion for cricket was best demonstrated by his annual occupation of the back row of one of the Members Stands at the SCG with some of his friends as they watched the whole of the Sydney test match.

As both his close friend Jerry Tombleson and his son Alex said at his funeral, Tony was a dedicated family man who remained first and foremost dedicated to his wife Judy. His main delight in recent years was spending time with his four

adult children, Michael, Alex, Matthew and Jessica, his three daughters-in-law, Alicia, Fiona and Alyssa and, more recently, his two grandchildren, Charlie and Liam. He developed a passion and a talent for photography (he liked to tell a good story and he claimed it started in the old matrimonial causes days) which he used to great effect on the regular trips and holidays that he undertook with Judy in the years before his death.

Tony was known for his wit, irreverence and dislike of all things politically correct. He was widely known and liked in so many different circles in Newcastle. The Newcastle Cathedral could not hold all those who attended his funeral. He was a familiar figure every morning as he firstly undertook his morning walk along the beaches of Newcastle, waving to or stopping to chat to people along the way and then as he rode his Vespa to work. For many years he occupied the front table at a coffee shop close to his chambers in Newcastle from where he greeted everyone as they walked by.

As my brother-in-law, Tony moved my admission as a solicitor in 1982 and introduced me to some of the solicitors that he knew (and insisted they give me work!) when I came to the bar in 1998. I benefited greatly from his advice and experience in my early years at the bar.

He is no doubt a great loss to the Newcastle legal fraternity and wider community and will be missed by his wife Judy, his mother Gloria, his family, including all of the extended Cavanagh family, and his many friends.

By Richard Cavanagh