

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



E G WHITLAM CENTENARY CELEBRATION DINNER

11 JULY 2016

VC'S SPEAKING NOTES

Chancellor, the Honourable John Faulkner and members of the Whitlam Institute Board, members of the Whitlam family, distinguished guests one and all,

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you all to the Whitlam Institute for this very special gathering.

These are Darug lands and on behalf of all here I pay my respect to their Elders past present.

We gather this evening to acknowledge another Elder. The Elder whom Noel Pearson immortalised as 'this Old Man'. The one Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody dubbed the 'tall stranger' who appeared in the Gurindji lands and 'through Vincent's fingers poured a handful of sand'.

Edward Gough Whitlam, Fred and Martha Whitlam's first child, was born one hundred years ago today on Tuesday 11 July 1916 in the family home in 46 Rowland St Kew. Ngara, as it was known, was built the previous year by Martha's father, master builder Edward Maddocks.

According to a report in *The Age* at the time of Gough's death, Ngara is an indigenous word of the Darug people that means "to listen, hear and think".¹ How apt and how strange to think that just shy of eighty-four years after Gough's birth, in April 2000, a Memorandum of Understanding would be signed here on Darug lands establishing the Whitlam Institute.

The Whitlam Institute has had no better friends than Gough and Margaret themselves. They were unstinting in their support and were frequent visitors throughout the years that followed its establishment. The depth of their trust is evident in their gift, and the gift of the Whitlam family, of more than 30,000 items: letters, speeches, books, journals, diaries, artworks, school reports, memorabilia, photos.

¹ Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/planning-minister-matthew-guys-backflip-to-save-gough-whitlam-childhood-home-20141023-11acma.html#ixzz4D7sCe08w>

Gifts supplemented by others including Graham Freudenberg who donated his papers and Carol Summerhayes who has not only donated the secretarial notebooks (in Summerhayes shorthand) from the Whitlam years but is transcribing them for posterity. Graham and Carol are here this evening and I acknowledge not just their generosity but their years of public service.

The Whitlam Prime Ministerial Collection, archived in the East Wing of this building, is one of the more important collections in the country. It is the heart and soul of the Whitlam Institute.

The Whitlam Institute assumed further custodial responsibilities on behalf of the nation with the restoration of the Female Orphan School and its adaptation as its permanent home. This is not only one of the oldest buildings in the country but the keeper of our social history from colonial times through to the present: a place that tells the story of governmental responsibility in education and health and in redressing disadvantage. It is a complex story of good intentions manifest in the failings and achievements of evolving practices. It is, at its heart, the story of the children and adults for whom this place was home.

Gough's imperative that the Whitlam Institute be of contemporary relevance is honoured in a robust and growing program of public policy research and development, in its burgeoning education and community activities. This place is coming back to life with the sounds of school students, public tours and exhibitions, policy forums and debates, art, literature and , as you will soon experience, sublime music.

Western Sydney University is honoured to have been chosen by Gough as home to the Whitlam Institute. It is not easy though to convey just how much we value the Institute. The presence of the Chancellor, Professor Peter Shergold, and my predecessor as Vice-Chancellor, Janice Reid, here this evening is some indication of this. It was Jan, I think, who first suggested that the Whitlam Institute is the jewel in the university's increasingly bejewelled crown and the Chancellor I'm told recently referred to the Institute simply as the 'gold standard'.

The Whitlam Institute's Director, Eric Sidoti, is fond of saying that the Institute unapologetically comes from a social democratic tradition and does not shy away from the hard questions or challenging orthodoxy. This is true and neither Gough nor this University would want it any other way. However, what sets this Institute apart is the measure of its standing and the integrity of its work.

It is evident in the respect it has earned across the board.

My point is that the Whitlam Institute is already a unique and nationally significant institution that is custodian of critically important elements of our heritage, social and political history while, at the same time, being alive to the contemporary challenges confronting our country. It embodies the Whitlam Legacy in all its facets: educational, intellectual and cultural.

On these Darug lands the Whitlam Institute finds its home not just for the time being, not just for a decade or two to come, not just for this life but for the ages - to borrow from Gough himself.

This evening is a celebration but it also marks the establishment of the E. G. Whitlam Endowment . The endowment recognises that this Institute is established in perpetuity and we must begin now to secure its future.

Your support for the work of the Whitlam Institute is absolutely vital. There is no desire nor need for me to labour this point. I am conscious that there are a number of people in this room who have already made very generous gifts to the Institute's program and, in some cases, as early contributors to the Endowment. I won't embarrass you but I do want to once again express our deepest appreciation.

For those who may wish to do so, there is an opportunity to make a gift this evening. To do this you need only fill out one of the cards on your table and later in the evening a member of the Institute's staff will collect it. You will see there that you can make a donation of whatever amount you might be comfortable with – with the option to contribute directly to the Endowment.

We also thought some might be interested in purchasing a special memento to take with you this evening. At the time of Gough's 91st birthday the Institute released a limited edition of the landmark 1972 'men and women of Australia' policy speech in a beautifully designed book with an introduction by Graham Freudenberg published by Giramondo press. There is an accompanying presentation scroll both of which Gough signed for us at the time. If interested you can simply ask a member of the staff.

That's it as far as any appeal to your generosity for this evening.

You need only look around you to appreciate that the Board and staff of the Whitlam Institute have been determined that this Centenary Dinner would be a special gathering of our friends here at the Institute in this beautiful setting. I have been looking forward to this evening with great anticipation.

One reason for this is that we are especially fortunate to have the Australia Piano Quartet here to perform for us. The APQ has been Ensemble in Residence at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) since 2012. Their busy performance schedule includes a series presented by the Sydney Opera House and Melbourne Recital Centre, as well as international tours throughout Europe and Asia. Following a successful debut at London's Barbican Centre in 2015, APQ is returning to the (formerly) United Kingdom in 2016 for performances at Wigmore Hall, and will also be touring China and France.

In addition to their exploration of canonic masterpieces of the piano quartet repertoire, the ensemble is committed to unearthing neglected works of past and present, while championing the creation of new work. To date they have commissioned over 20 new piano quartets from a diverse range of established and emerging Australian composers, including Elliott Gyger, Elena Kats-Chernin, Jack Symonds, Paul Dean and William Barton.

This evening we will be hearing two pieces: Mozart's Piano Quarter in E Flat Major and the Piano Quartet in C Minor Opus 13 by Richard Strauss.

Please welcome Daniel de Borah, Thomas Rann, Rebecca Chan and James Wannan: the Australian Piano Quartet.