

Installation Address

The Chancellor, Prof. Peter Shergold
19 March 2011

Your Excellency, colleagues, friends.

I begin by thanking Aunty Edna, Custodial Elder, for her welcome to country. It is entirely appropriate on a formal occasion such as this, to recognise – and reflect upon the fact - that we meet at a place that was Aboriginal land. The area that is now Western Sydney was cared for by the Darug people. Here it was the Burramattagal clan: to the north were the Bediaghal, to the west the Buruberongal and to the south the Gabrogal. They were joined as a common language group, although the hinterland peoples between here and the Nepean spoke a different dialect from those, such as the Gadigal people, who lived on the harbour.

When the First Fleet arrived in 1788 there were around 3,000–5,000 Darug-speaking Aboriginal people in the greater Sydney hinterland, living for most of the time in small family or clan groups of 20-60 people, but on occasion coming together in much larger numbers. The earliest rock shelter settlements we know of in this area – at Shaws Creek on the Nepean and Darling Mills on the Upper Parramatta River – have been radiocarbon dated at 12,000 – 18,000 years old. A more recent archaeological dig on the corner of George and Charles Streets in Parramatta found evidence of 30,000 years of habitation. That's 300 centuries. The site is now buried beneath a Meriton apartment block.

The life of the clans that lived along the Hawkesbury, Nepean and Georges Rivers, and across the western plains between, had been based on fishing, hunting kangaroo and possum, gathering plant food and collecting shellfish. It had been rich in ceremony. Tragically but typically, white settlement quickly had a disastrous impact on these indigenous peoples. The smallpox epidemic of 1789 was the harbinger of later outbreaks of measles, whopping-cough, influenza and dysentery that devastated the Aboriginal inhabitants of this area. Disease, loss of land and access to resources, combined with outbreaks of violence, destroyed much of traditional life with brutal speed.

In 1814 the Parramatta Native Institution to 'civilise, Christianise and educate' Aboriginal children was founded. The mission was relocated - to 'Black Town' – in 1823. Children who attended those schools still have descendants in Western Sydney. Maria, daughter of Yarramundi, brought up in the Native Institution, married the convict Robert Lock and many of their offspring still live in this area. Indeed, Aunty Edna is a direct descendant of Maria and Robert.

However, as I discovered when I had a cup of tea with the Indigenous Elders who support the University, the growing Indigenous population of Greater Western Sydney is in many ways a product of more recent migration from coastal and rural NSW and beyond. The 30,000 Aboriginal people who today live in Western and South-Western Sydney are a crucial part of our University's future - and we of theirs.

We also meet today at a location that is central to our earliest convict and pioneer settlement. It is customary to think of these newcomers as Anglo-Celtic or, more accurately, English and Irish. That is wrong. The rich ethnic diversity that characterises Western Sydney today has its antecedents in the region's convict past.

Let me introduce just a few characters from Western Sydney's convict era. There is the Greek Adonis Manolis, from the island of Hydra, transported for piracy in the Mediterranean off Libya in 1827. With his 6 compatriots he introduced grape-growing to William Macarthur's Elizabeth Farm. Later pardoned, he settled in Camden, married an Irish wife and had 10 children.

There's Abraham Van Brien, a well-educated and highly literate merchant's clerk born in Archangel, Russia, whose penchant for forgery found him transported from London but whose administrative skills enabled him to be appointed clerk at the Commissariat Department

at Parramatta. Serving his term he returned to England only to forge once again. He was transported for a second time.

There's James Larra, born in France of Sephardic-Spanish ancestry, transported in 1790. Dubbed the 'honest Jew', Larra became 'the commercial nabob of Parramatta'. Another man of Jewish origin was Jacob Josephson, born in Breslau, Prussia, a silversmith. Described as a 'Hebrew teacher' he was actually the exact opposite, working in what we would today describe as the not-for-profit sector, in the Society for Promoting Christianity amongst Jews. He also dealt in forged banknotes. Transported to NSW he reverted to silversmithing and became 'an Australian celebrity'. After a brief spell in debtors' prison he quickly bounced back speculating successfully in city real estate before investing his profits in an inn near Penrith.

Finally, let me introduce you to my favourite character, Jan Herman Mais, 'a man of dark colour' from Mauritius, a clever fellow transported for counterfeiting who, given his extensive education, was given a position at the Commissariat Department in Liverpool. A fine administrator but better forger, he managed to defraud the colonial government of several hundred pounds by inventing the construction of a new road, assigning 25 fictitious convicts to labour on it and accruing the payments for the performance of their non-existent work. Authorities became suspicious only when he spent up big during a holiday in Sydney town. Tried and found guilty at Campbelltown Assizes, he was the last person hanged in NSW for forgery. I say this with great caution, not wishing to begin my Chancellorship on an ethically inappropriate note, but I cannot help reflecting that - properly supervised - Mais' entrepreneurial skills may have been a great asset in the University's quest to obtain appropriate levels of public funding.

And what authority do I have for these quirky but suggestive facts? My own: they are the discarded note-cards of a far more sedate economic history that I wrote a generation ago and which - being of academic persuasion - I knew would come in handy one day!

Such antiquarian oddities are, of course, merely delicate threads in the richly interwoven narrative of the growth and development of Western Sydney. The heritage of those early settlers, free and convict, form an essential part of the early European history of this area: indeed, as Governor Phillip quickly recognised, without the richer soils out here the future for Sydney looked bleak indeed. The University is proud of this heritage, represented by the Old Government House (Australia's oldest surviving public building), Elizabeth Farm House, the Parramatta Convict Female Factory and - right here on campus - the Female Orphan School. For those of you who doubt that there are two Sydneys, think on this: can one imagine that if these buildings were in Macquarie Street or The Rocks that they would be so poorly recognised or their restoration so poorly funded?

Thankfully I sense that the politics of second-best is changing fast. Low income, poor education, social exclusion and disadvantage - the characteristics that so often perpetuate negative stereotypes - represent only a part of a far more dynamic and disparate region that stretches over nearly 9,000 square kilometres. Greater Western Sydney is increasingly recognised as a bustling, energetic metropolis of 14 local government areas embracing almost 2 million people. A third of its population migrated here from overseas. Growing at more than 2% a year, it is now Australia's fourth most populous metropolitan area. Some 400,000 new residential dwellings are planned for the next 25 years. Another million people will live here by then. And this region, home to more than 1 in 11 Australians, is served by just one extraordinary University of which I'm proud to be installed as Chancellor today.

Australia remains for me a very big place. So, too, UWS and its 6 campuses. From our Werrington/Penrith campus in the west to our Bankstown campus in the east is 44 kilometres:

from Hawkesbury in the north to Campbelltown in the south is 69 kilometres. According to Google I can travel from the University of New South Wales in Kensington to the University of Sydney, then on to UTS at Broadway and the Sydney campus of Notre Dame, stop off at the Australian Catholic University site in North Sydney for lunch before ending up my higher education journey at Macquarie: 7 institutions in less than 32 kilometres. By contrast the fastest way I've yet found to drive between UWS' campuses is around 106 kilometres.

Is it any wonder then that the challenges facing UWS can intimidate the faint-hearted? We're the fastest-growing university in NSW, intending to increase from 40,000 to 53,000 students by 2020. We now offer more places than any other university in NSW or the ACT. Although we take a significant number of students from overseas and elsewhere in Australia, we're dedicated to serving our region. Indeed almost three-quarters of our domestic students come from this region and it is likely that most will make their future careers here.

There is no Australian university more committed to opening up opportunities for higher education to those who traditionally would have been excluded by family background, poverty or distance. Almost a quarter of our students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. The UWS College, which provides supported assistance to those who would have otherwise failed to gain entry, is our latest bold innovation in giving people a second chance. Our Fast Forward program, undertaken in partnership with 49 local high schools, encourages students – often for the first time – to aspire to a university education.

We have challenges but how energising they are. When many other universities in developed countries are looking at how to sustain themselves through economic downturn and declining student numbers, we have to worry about how fast we can dare to expand. For myself, the University executive and the Board of Trustees which I chair, the task is how to manage strategically the growth of an institution.

I see 5 key elements that frame our future. First, we have extensive land assets that we need to harness as a source of income in order to build new educational infrastructure. We need to assess the land we need for future campus development (and continue to maintain it to the highest standards) but also seize the opportunity to transform our real estate holdings into educational sustainability. We are already committed to investing \$200 million in new buildings. More are on the drawing-board.

Second, we need to continue, indeed accelerate, the journey to building academic excellence. A growing tradition of quality teaching, combined with ongoing commitment to opening access to disadvantaged students, should not deter or preclude us from developing areas of research of an international standard. We are already doing so in areas from health and medicine to culture and literature; from environment, engineering and education to communication and civil society. Our interests stretch from the Whitlam Institute to the Hawkesbury Forest Experiment and a hundred places in-between. We will do more. A program to recruit 100 top-ranking academics for each of the next 5 years bears testimony to that commitment. So does the offering of 'research lectureships' to young ambitious scholars. I do not envisage that UWS will in the foreseeable future be characterised as a 'research university'. It will, increasingly, be recognised around the world as a university with significant research strengths in a growing number of areas of enquiry.

Third, we need to think local but engage global. The intensity of our partnerships with Greater Western Sydney – through the region's schools, local governments, businesses and community enterprises – helps to nurture our sense of place. But our students, as much as our academic staff, need to feel that they are part of an international community of scholars. The internet

broadband provides a far more reliable and expeditious route to knowledge than the vagaries of Western Sydney's public transport network.

Fourth, in driving growth in both scale and quality, we need to maintain and enhance the distinctive identity which UWS now enjoys. I pay tribute to the leadership over more than a decade to our Vice-Chancellor, Jan Reid, in this regard. I particularly acknowledge my two predecessors – Sir Ian Turbott and John Phillips – who steered the university through the troubles of the past to its strong cohesive position today.

Finally, in providing new opportunities to our students we need to inculcate in them an ethos that they have the responsibility of giving back. A university is more than the splendid peacockery of learning displayed in serried rows of silken gowns today. We have an obligation to introduce in those we teach and understanding that in benefitting personally from their UWS education they need to think of how, beyond their family responsibilities and career aspirations, they can most usefully contribute to society.

In the quest for social justice the graduates of the University of Western Sydney must come to appreciate that they are not only the fortunate beneficiaries of educational opportunity. As our alumni it is through their collective efforts that, in a myriad of different ways, they can help to shape an open, inclusive, participatory and tolerant Australia – a nation of opportunity - which they can bequest to their children.

It is through them that UWS will progressively enhance its influence and reputation, based proudly here in Western Sydney but open to the world.

I hope that in a small way I can contribute to that ambitious mission.