

Murdoch University Historical Lectures  
Verbatim Transcript  
Special Collections



|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Title</b>    | Inauguration ceremony of Murdoch University  |
| <b>Speakers</b> | Mr Justice John Wickham; Emeritus Professor Noel Bayliss; Professor Stephen Griew; Sir John Kerr |
| <b>Series</b>   |  |
| <b>Date</b>     | 17 September 1974  |

**JW:** Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen. I will not today mention the names of all the distinguished guests present. Murdoch University extends a welcome to all the people of Western Australia whether they may be here or not, but including, among those who are here, the Deputy Premier of Western Australia, the acting Chief Justice representing the judicial branch of government both state and federal, the Leader of the Opposition, ministers of the Crown both state and federal, leaders of the churches, the Lord Mayor, and civic and other leaders.

Your Excellency, Murdoch University is honoured to welcome you here, both personally and as the representative of Her Majesty the Queen. This is your first inauguration of a new university on behalf of Her Majesty and we hope that there may be many more. We also hope sir, that you will find a particular interest in this university. The work of the university will include the study of the culture, history, literature and language of Southeast Asia and of the Far East

generally, and knowing of your deep interest in the affairs of this region for many years, I am sure sir, that you will be pleased to hear that among the first foreign languages to be taught at Murdoch will be Malay and Chinese.

The university extends a special welcome to one person, here who's sitting in the front row; none other than Lady Murdoch. We welcome you, Lady Murdoch, very warmly indeed. I include in that a welcome to all the late Professor Murdoch's relatives. Last night I was told that one of the grandchildren had said that this function today was a grossly ostentatious example of totally unnecessary pomp and ceremony. So you will be pleased to know that the Murdoch family is still in good form, and that Sir Walter did indeed live to be a hundred. I will not, this afternoon, say anything further of Sir Walter. Professor John La Nauze, a well-known Western Australian, has come from the National University at Canberra to speak to us tonight in Winthrop Hall about his work and his life.

It is not possible, in the time available this afternoon, to thank all the people who have been employed and involved in the origins, foundation and promotion of this university. The planning board, presided over by Professor Bayliss, was in the forefront of those efforts and the whole operation has been an outstanding example of cooperation by all sections of the community, both public and private. Our energetic and enthusiastic Vice Chancellor, Professor Steven Griew has devoted himself untiringly to the preparation for the opening of the university to students next year, and he will be speaking to you in a few moments.

In the meantime, however I have the honour to ask Professor Bayliss to address us. Professor Bayliss, as Chairman of the planning board, was at the conception of Murdoch. He gave close prenatal attention to it, attended at the birth and has since and still is continually on hand in the nursery. The thanks of the whole community must go to Professor Bayliss for the work which he has so unsparingly done, and indeed proposes to continue. And it is on that note, Professor Bayless, that I invite you to address us.

**NB:** Mr. Chancellor, your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen. It was a happy inspiration to decide to hold the ceremony marking the birth of the new university on the centenary of the birth of the man after whom the university is named, Walter Murdoch. The ceremony is taking place at almost the highest point of a campus of nearly two, six hundred acres, or should we say, two hundred forty hectares. We're close to the northern boundary which is confusingly named South Street, and the southern boundary is about one and a half kilometres away. It is just over half a kilometre to Murdoch Drive that bounds us to the east and about one kilometre to the western edge. Just beyond Murdoch Drive to the east is the site of a future major hospital, while to the south of our campus lies a considerable area that has been designated for public recreation by the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority.

This site, the buildings that are assuming their final shape and, most important of all, the idea of the university that will find its home here are the results of the thoughts, the planning and the ideals of a number of dedicated people, far too many to be mentioned individually in this brief introductory address. Thoughts about the need for a second university institution in Western Australia began to

nucleate in the early sixties. Although the early ideas were largely theoretical with little hope of early realisation, alternative concepts were being debated in campus circles, such as that of an undergraduate college of the University of Western Australia, or of a junior college on the American plan.

As early as 1962, the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority recommended that land for university purposes should be reserved, not far to the northeast from where we now are, near Bull Creek, a name that at the time excited merriment in academic circles, in spite of the example of the tertiary institution that is situated near the ford for oxen on the river Thames.

A major step forward was taken in 1967 when the committee appointed by the State Government to report on tertiary education, popularly known after its chairman as the Jackson committee, recommended that the University of Western Australia should be encouraged to plan for a university college, to open during the triennium 1973-75, the college in the first instance to cater only for first and second year students. In the same report, the committee suggested that, rather than the Bull Creek site, a more suitable location would be in the Somerville Pine Plantation, part of the endowment lands of the University of Western Australia, a location where, in fact, we are now gathered.

The detailed story of the site is a complex one, but in outline it may be said that the concept of the association in this area of a university, a hospital and a regional recreation space originated in the plan put forward by a working party set up by the University of Western Australia and the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority. The party consisted of Professor Gordon Stephenson and the

late John Lloyd, and the essential realisation of the concept has been made possible by the cooperation of the State Government and the University of Western Australia, with Commonwealth financial assistance made available through the Australian Universities Commission.

During the months that followed the publication of the Jackson report, there were a series of seminars and discussions on the Crawley campus concerning the form of the new institution. The alternative concepts of a junior college, an undergraduate college of the University of Western Australia and a separate autonomous university all had their supporters. I must now confess in public that at that time I was one of those who were attracted to the idea of an undergraduate college under the umbrella of the University of Western Australia. Fortunately for Murdoch University, wiser counsels prevailed and towards the end of 1969, the Senate of the University of Western Australia advised the Government of its opinion, that the new institution should be independent and autonomous from the very beginning.

The stage was now set. The Australian Universities Commission, in its 1969 report, had already agreed to support a new institution that would open in 1975 and early in 1970, it was announced that State and Commonwealth governments had the fourth veterinary school in Australia would be established in the West. The curtain rose when the State Government, at the beginning of July 1970, announced its intention to establish the new university as an autonomous institution. It appointed a twelve-man planning board to formulate the plans for the first phase of the new university and when the board met for the first time on the ninth of July 1970, a letter was read from the Premier of the

day, Sir David Brand, conveying the government's decision to name the university after that well-loved humanist and scholar Walter Murdoch, whose life had been part of the Western Australian community for so long.

Conventions of procedure and protocol don't tell one what to do when a board meets for the first time to found a new university. What is on the agenda paper? There are none of the Parkinsonian devices such as the minutes of the last meeting, business arising or committee reports. In other words, there is a blank sheet and an open go, subject of course, always, to that glance over the shoulder from the Treasury and from the Universities Commission.

Apart from the question of the site, which in broad outline had been settled by the time the board assumed office, the board was confronted by two major problems, one of which can be described as temporal and the other possibly as ideological. As it turned out the temporal problem solved itself. It arose from an initial sense of urgency, that in order to have the veterinary school operational without undue delay and also to relieve the increasing pressure on the Crawley campus, Murdoch should plan to open as early as possible. The year 1974 became a target, and even a 1972 opening for the veterinary school was mentioned at that time. However, the Australian Universities Commission was decidedly lukewarm to the proposal, and the enthusiasm in other quarters diminished with the onset of the financial recession of 1971. And so the board returned to the original plan for an opening of the university in 1975.

The other problem was more subtle. Although in July 1970, the year 1975 seemed a long way ahead, it was realised that a great deal had to be done in the

meantime, including the appointment of foundation staff and the planning and the erection of the first group of buildings. But how to begin? A university is more than a campus plan and a group of buildings. It consists of people, and the kind of university you have depends on the kind of people who are its members and yet you cannot invite people at random to form a university. In making the early appointments, the board, of necessity, have to have some broad idea of the kind of university that it would like to see grow up here south of the river. At the same time, the board from the beginning was unanimous in its belief that the eventual planning should be the responsibility of, and entrusted to, the people who were to be the university.

From time to time the board asked itself the specific question, what kind of university do we want, without ever really finding a specific answer, a circumstance that won't really surprise those who have any acquaintance with the vast literature on the place and function of a university in the modern community. I think it would be fair to say that the board felt its way towards a plan that was sufficiently general in outline to express the hopes and ideals of its members and yet not so specific as to compromise the freedom of planning of the first members of the university.

Academic planning began to assume a more definite shape with the arrival of the Vice Chancellor in October 1972, followed shortly thereafter by the first few of the foundation professors. Certain elements of the academic plan were fixed from the beginning, namely the veterinary school and a commitment to the training of teachers. Also, a benefaction in the Western Mining Corporation directed our attention toward environmental studies. However, the program of

studies at the core of the university, in the humanities and in the natural and social sciences that is now emerging from the work of the foundation professors, is more imaginative and more exciting in every way than the tentative ideas which circulated around the board table from time to time.

When the Senate of Murdoch University met for the first time on the third of August last year, the work of the planning board came to an end and the board ceased to exist. As its chairman during those three years, I am proud to be here today to join in this ceremony to signalise the birth of the new university. A great university man of last century wrote the following words and I quote "To set on foot, and to maintain in life and vigour, a real university is one of those greatest works, great in their difficulty and their importance, on which are deservedly expended the rarest intellects and the most varied endowments. For first of all, its professors to teach whatever has to be taught in whatever department of human knowledge and it embraces in its scope the loftiest subjects of human thought and the richest fields of human inquiry. Nothing is too vast, nothing too subtle, nothing too distant, nothing too minute, nothing too discursive, nothing too exact, to engage its attention." The end of the quotation.

Today ladies and gentlemen, we bring together two landmarks in time and space as symbols. The landmark in time that is the centenary of the birth of Walter Murdoch and the landmark in space that hopefully will become a benchmark or focal point of a new development in university education.

**JW:** Thank you Professor Bayliss and thank you particularly for inventing the verb nucleate. It's a, it's a wonderful word and I propose to use it on every



possible occasion in the future. Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice Chancellor Professor Stephen Griew.

**SG:** Mr. Chancellor, Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen. In comparison with the great universities of other continents, those of Australia are very young. Yet like their counterparts elsewhere they occupy illustrious positions in the world of human affairs. In common with all universities, we at Murdoch espouse certain values which we shall be prepared to defend to the last ditch.

Universities exist, among other things, so that excellence may be fostered in any of the magnificent forms it takes. Being a student at Murdoch University will carry with it the responsibility to strive towards excellence. Our students, like those of all universities worthy of the name, will realise that their work with us will be judged according to the international standards of excellence.

Universities are places at which people may, indeed must, disagree if intellectual honesty dictates disagreement. We at Murdoch University shall defend the rights of all to disagree if by capitulating they threaten the fundamental value of intellectual honesty. There is no place in universities for dispute on any but a rational level and we shall have no truck whatsoever with any who attempt to short circuit reasoned argument by sophistry, cant or bluster.

An eminent Australian statesman once graciously described universities as the guardians of the souls of society. Their very insistence on the value of reasoned argument and intellectual honesty, during the past tumultuous five hundred years of human history, itself fully justifies that description. But the spiritual

values that go to make up the soul of a society do not only comprise concerns of the intellect and reason.

Universities have other concerns as well. They have a responsibility to conserve, to cherish and to value things of beauty from whatever department of human endeavour they may emerge. Murdoch University will share this responsibility and will play its part in enriching the aesthetic life of this community. We hope particularly to provide a focus for local community talent and we are proud that the first sculpture on our campus is a splendid piece by Western Australian sculptor Maris Raudzins.

Universities who traditionally played a major role in training people for the professions, and for careers as leaders in the affairs of men. Murdoch University will have failed if it too does not provide graduates capable of taking their places in the front ranks of the professions, industry teaching and public affairs. We have no intention of abrogating this critical responsibility. Our graduates will rate with the best in Australia and the world generally.

And universities have another, and in our view equally important, mission. That is to prepare students for full lives, not only as members of the labour force, but also as useful and informed citizens and mature individuals who have realised the potential with which they have been endowed. We expect that our insistence that no education is complete if it is too narrowly specialised, and our particular concern for the development in our students of informed and responsible attitudes to the crucial issues of our time, will help our graduates to achieve the

full and rewarding lives that they justifiably seek.

Thus, though Murdoch University derives great inspiration from the example of its older brothers and sisters, it will not imitate them slavishly. The fact that a second autonomous university was created at all in Western Australia was in itself a mandate to us to look searchingly at our preconceived ideas and at the established ways of doing things.

Murdoch University will be distinctive. We are hoping to develop a unique role for ourselves in bringing a university education within the reach of many talented people who are not otherwise catered for in these parts, and in providing important areas of study that, not being available elsewhere, are necessary if the talents and aspirations of all of today's students are fully to be realised. We propose also fully to realize the opportunities we have, being a new university, to try new things, new ways of doing things and to extend the range of activities for which universities traditionally accept responsibility.

Students have always been concerned with matters affecting the well-being of the community in which they live, and by the injustices that abound even in the most democratic, egalitarian and compassionate of societies. In recent years universities have come to appreciate that this is a concern to which indifference is neither possible nor proper. At Murdoch University we shall not turn our backs on these issues, but treat them squarely as worthy of the kinds of committed inquiry characterising all that is best in a university education. In all these ways we believe that we shall best serve not only our students, but the state and this

country as well.

To all of us who are privileged to be part of this exciting venture, the experience is at times both frightening and humbling. It is one that forces an acknowledgement of the very heavy debts that we owe to others. To the government of the day that decided in its great wisdom to establish a second university in Western Australia, the state owes an enduring debt of gratitude and incidentally we, the hired hands, of our jobs. Both governments, since the planning board was established in 1970, have supported us magnificently and to the offices of the various government departments with whom it has always been a great pleasure to deal, we are deeply grateful. As a matter of fact, this occasion itself owes a great deal to the Surveyor General for Western Australia and his minister, whose idea it was to provide the sum to enable us to commission the sculpture that accompanies the campus survey march. This is typical of the interest expressed in so very material a way, by all government departments and we are truly most grateful.

The Murdoch University planning board was officially disbanded when the Senate came into being just over a year ago. Its influence will be felt by the university for many years to come. The planning board and in particular its chairman, Professor Bayliss, must be regarded as the true spiritual architects of Murdoch University, and our debt to them will never wholly be repaid. The many people who have helped us transform this remarkable site into the beginnings of a campus that will surely become one of the most distinguished in the country, we should always remember with great affection.

Today's surroundings give substance to Professor Stephenson's belief that campus planners should build parks that students from afar would choose to starve in, rather than go home. Professor Stephenson and Mr Ferguson will nevertheless forgive me, I hope, if I warn them that we shall know who to blame should any of our students in the years to come decide not to go home but to occupy our buildings more than is customary.

I cannot hope to acknowledge all those who have assisted us so magnificently over the past few years but I should like finally to express, on behalf of all those on the staff, our profound gratitude to our friends at the University of Western Australia, who have treated us with a forbearance and generosity far beyond the call of brotherly duty. Without their support our task would have been immeasurably more difficult and we appreciate most deeply all that they have done for us over the past few years.

This, sir, is a ceremony that happens only once in the lifetime of a university. It comes at the end of many years of planning. Far from being a culmination however, it represents but one incident at the beginning of a tiny fragment of the history of an institution that will develop and mature over many hundreds of years. We look forward to our fragment of that history with many great pleasure and excitement.

**JW:** Thank you Vice Chancellor. I now have the honour to invite His Excellency, the Governor General of Australia to speak to us and after that to set in place, as a symbol of the inauguration of this university, a commemorative central survey plaque. This is hewn from a stone brought from the birthplace of Sir

Walter Murdoch, and the stone will be handed to His Excellency by the sculptor, Mr. Raudzins. But in the meantime, ladies and gentlemen, the Governor-General of Australia.

**JK:** Mr Chancellor. Well I think it'd be apparent to you all that I am something of a long hair. I'm having, out here in the open, a great deal of difficulty with my hair. I assure you that my staff made quite certain that I had a haircut before I came over here but there is a big debate going on in Government House, Canberra as to whether or not I should be forced to go back to short back and sides, and on the whole, sitting here in the breeze, I think the oldies will probably win.

It is a great honour to be here on this important occasion and to have heard the significant addresses which have been made. The birth of a university is indeed a great event. I have been allotted a quite simple task at this inaugural ceremony. It is the task of laying a foundation stone and making a few remarks. I have as you would expect done my best to prepare myself for this simple task. I have read a lot of material about this new university and endeavoured to understand in particular its emerging philosophy of education, its policy on the admission of students, and the way in which its programs and the structure of its courses have been developed. I have, as well, re-read some of the essays of Sir Walter Murdoch, reacquainted myself with some of the details of his extraordinary life, and in particular I have read the address delivered at the time of his death by my distinguished predecessor Sir Paul Hasluck.

I did all of this not with the intention of making a mundane contribution of my own to the much more learned and brilliant accounts that would be given by others far better able to do so than I, but so that I might capture, as well as I could, the general spirit of this occasion and this I believe I can, with due modesty, say that I have in some measure succeeded in doing.

As there is to be the laying of a foundation stone, it is a charming thought that the stone has been brought from the birth place of Sir Walter Murdoch. Of course, no one could undertake the task of laying a foundation stone in these circumstances without seeing the twinkling eye of Sir Walter and his ironic smile somewhere in the background. No one could fail to imagine him here, producing in his mind the first paragraph of an essay which might be entitled "Foundation Stones and Those Who Lay Them".

There was a Minister of Education in New South Wales, in a period of prolific expansion in the number of schools. He laid all his own foundation standards and New South Wales is peppered with them. This will be my first but even so, a Murdoch essay could undoubtedly be inspired by such a act, by such a new Governor-General, in honour of a university so named. The second essay would probably be emerging at the same time in that fertile humorous and ironic mind on inaugurations and other tribal ceremonies.

I interrupted my prepared notes to tell you a cricket story which may make some point about inaugurations and other tribal ceremonies. There was a young man from Africa who had been set up to become a rainmaker and he was in the course of learning his craft when he was captured by the Fulbright Scheme or

the Churchill Fellowship Scholarships or some such organisation, and given the beginnings of a Western education which took him abroad. And when he came back to his tribe, he told them of the wonders that he had seen in the civilized world, but there was one tribal ceremony that he had seen which it had impressed him enormously.

It took place at a place, he said, in England, called Lords, and there, there was a beautiful spread of grass, round and with nothing on it. And at an appointed hour, eleven o'clock or thereabouts, two priests came out, each of them carrying three sticks and some smaller sticks. They went to the middle of the ground, they put in the sticks and the small sticks across the top, and then eleven further priests came out, clad completely in white and took up obviously strategic positions at different places upon the ceremonial ground.

Soon after, two very high priests came out, also clad in white, padded and protected in various ways. And they took their position exactly, precisely, at each end of an obviously carefully measured distance between the two sets of sticks. The eleven other priests then all crouched down on their haunches and at that moment down came the rain and it rained for four days.

Inaugurations and other ceremonies, well perhaps we will leave that to the younger members of the Murdoch family who we are told are keeping up the tradition.

It has repeatedly been said that Sir Walter hated humbug and the suburban in life, but it is our fate, and doubtless was his during his lifetime, to accept



tolerantly the mores of the tribe, and though he may have encouraged us to examine them and to laugh a little about them, he would, I think, be the first to forgive us all for succumbing and applying two of our customs appropriate for such an occasion; the ceremony of inauguration and the laying of the foundation stone. Accordingly, I do not need to call on any dubious resources of courage to undertake my own pleasant duty in this ceremony today. A ceremony which honours him and calls upon him for continued inspiration.

A lot of new universities have been begun in recent years in Australia, and elsewhere, because of the demands becoming more and more widespread for a university education and because of growing populations. All of these universities, so far as I know, have endeavoured to embrace an educational philosophy in which a balance was struck between the great traditional values of the historic universities on the one hand, and the new values said to be needed to produce a relevant, modern university education in a rapidly changing world. Although I have read a great deal about what Sir Walter said about educational philosophy and universities, and have been tempted to quote from him, I have resisted the temptation because here all the appropriate quotations are well known and in everyone's minds, and my learning is insufficient to have enabled me to find the hidden gem in his writings not yet referred to in recent years.

This university is no exception to the rule of the balanced approach to the old and the new, but it has a magnificent heritage of wisdom still contemporary though this is the hundredth anniversary of his birth, and advance warnings pertinent for the future upon which to draw in the writings of Sir Walter Murdoch. This university will never be able to escape the fate of being tested

against his judgments, assessments, opinions and tolerant mockery. Although he played such a great part in the development of the other university, this one is named after him. It challenges all, in and under his name.

As the battles of the future in this institution begin to emerge, problems between administration and staff, problems within schools and departments, between students and staff and students and administration, and between factions within the student body, one can imagine the extent to which Sir Walter's writings will be quoted back and forth and their Delphic content explored and expounded. The Oracle will be found, I have no doubt, to have spoken in such a way as to give support and comfort to most contenders.

It is in every, it is the inevitable prospect of most institutions to be unable to live up to the ideals of their founders. A certain touch of mediocrity generally intrudes. In the case of universities, scarce money, scarce resources and the scarcity of genius and talent in teaching and inquiry, makes this more or less inevitable. But this university will be lucky in that, guided by its ever-present educational philosopher, it will be forced to recognise the intrusion of such elements of mediocrity as may, over the years, tend to mar it. Thus forced, it will undoubtedly be well placed to mitigate, perhaps even to remove, the flaws as they appear. It is not necessary for me to express the wish that this university as it grows will enjoy luck as well as inspiration. It has obviously already been very well endowed with both, but to avoid the encroaching taint of mediocrity requires a large measure of both.

It so happened that whilst I was thinking about this ceremony here today, a great and sad change took place in my personal life, as a result of which I have had to examine what course my Governor-Generalship shall now take. By force of circumstances I shall have, now, much more time on my hands than I wanted or expected. I have decided to enrol myself in an open university which already exists in Australia. According to my plans there will be only one student in this university, there will be no examinations, no courses, no orthodox teachers or teaching. I am rather uniquely placed to make myself the only student in this open university, which is of course Australia itself. I shall now have forced upon me ample resources of time, and I trust of energy as well, and of the physical means which are available to me as Governor-General to travel widely and to very distant places in Australia, and I hope to read and listen and think much in the way Sir Walter would have recommended.

You will therefore see me frequently in all parts of the West, learning what I can about this increasingly prosperous and interesting state. Whether invited or not, and I trust I shall be invited, you will see me occasionally here at this university as it grows, watching the way in which its ideals are satisfied, its health ensured, its conflict resolved and its compromises made. Given the opportunities which my unique office gives me, gives to the student that is to say in my Open University, and given the health and strength required, I shall come to know all of you people here in the West, I trust, much better than I do now.

I shall do my best to avoid humbug and too much formality, balancing traditional values and virtues against the need for innovation in the office of the Governor-Generalship, as you will have to do here in this university. For a few years with

the help of fate, we shall be travelling in time together, I as a person and this place as an institution and our paths will sometimes cross.

This new university will doubtless go on for centuries but I as a new Governor-General will soon go. The institution of the Governor-Generalship however, will continue. All I can do with it is to make my contribution according to my style and ability, and I suppose that is all you can do for your new university which is being inaugurated here today. I trust that we shall both have a measure of success, I in my new task and you in yours, in striking a congenial balance between the new and the old, between what we should and must keep, and what we should and must change.

Then Mr. Chancellor, let us, if this is the time, proceed to the task of laying the stone, each of us endeavouring to write, in our own minds, our own essay in the style of Murdoch upon such a performance and its symbolism.

**End of Transcription**