

Obituary – Dennis Arthur Norman

Darwin practitioner Dennis Norman was farewelled at a cremation service at Thorak Regional Cemetery on 2 July. Peter Tiffin represented the Law Society at the service and his remarks on behalf of the Society are reprinted below. In addition to those achievements mentioned by Mr Tiffin, the Law Society also pays tribute to Mr Norman for his longstanding support of public and voluntary activities. In particular, his regular assistance with coaching for the Interschool Mock Trial Competition was highly valued.

"We are gathered here to pay our last respects to a fellow practitioner, Dennis Arthur Norman, and to express our condolences to his widow, Pam and the members of his family. I am honoured to have been asked to speak on behalf of the President and members of the Law Society on this occasion.

Dennis Arthur Norman was born in Paignton in Devon, England on 9 January 1929.

He served for many years in the police in Southern England, rising to the rank of Chief Inspector. In the later years of his services he regularly appeared in court as a police prosecutor and at the same time studied for admission as a legal practitioner. He was admitted as a barrister in England and Wales on 24 November 1970.

In the 1970s, he moved to Papua New Guinea (as it then was), initially as a legal adviser to the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary. He was located at Police Headquarters at Konedobu. He was subsequently asked to assist with the training of Magistrates in the newly independent country and was attached to the University of Papua New Guinea for this purpose. It is my understanding that he was also himself appointed a Magistrate in New Guinea.

He was formally admitted as a practitioner in New Guinea on 22 February 1980.

He came to the Territory in 1981 (just three years after the Territory had achieved self-government, and was recruited by the Department of Law (as it was then) to be the officer-in-charge of the Department's office in Alice Springs. This was some 10 years before the establishment of a separate Office for the Director Prosecutions, and the office for which Dennis was responsible handled prosecutions, civil litigation, conveyancing and debt recovery work.

Dennis' own position was particularly difficult administratively. He answered to the Crown Prosecutor in Darwin

in relation to criminal matters, and to the Deputy Secretary of the Department in Darwin on administrative matters. The situation was also made difficult by the fact that self-government was still a recent achievement.

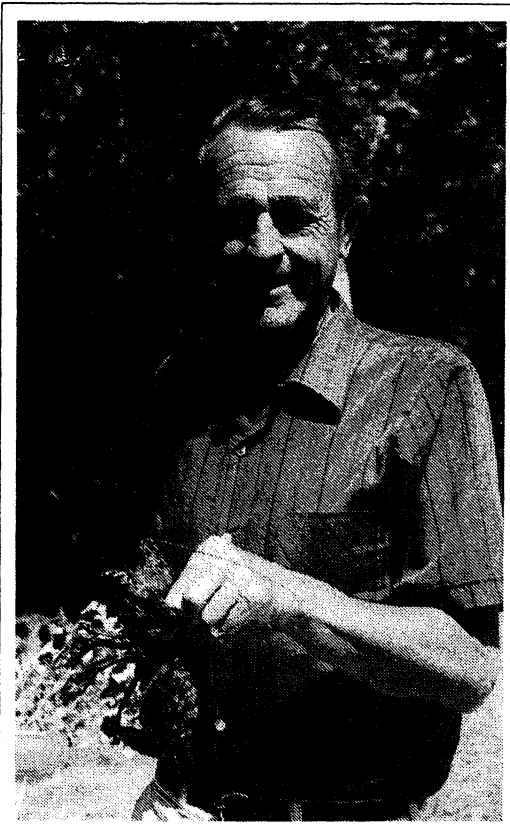
Dennis Norman was admitted as a legal practitioner in the Northern Territory on 12 October 1981. I pause for a moment to note those who were involved in the ceremony. The presiding judge was the Territory's first Chief Justice, William Edward Stanley Forster (who was knighted the following year).

Mr Norman's admission was moved by Mick O'Loughlin, who achieved some national prominence in connection with the Chamberlain trial which began in September 1992; the Law Society was represented by John Reeves (now John Reeves QC), and the court file was endorsed by the Judge's Associate, Richard Wallace, who is now a Stipendiary Magistrate here in Darwin.

After the usual period of probation, Dennis Norman was confirmed as a permanent employee in the Northern Territory Public Service by Brian Martin (who himself had been appointed Head of the Department of Law only in January 1981) and who is now, of course, the Chief Justice of the Northern Territory.

After a approximately 2 years as the officer-in-charge of the Alice Springs office, Dennis Norman moved to Darwin and worked as a prosecutor here for a short time.

In 1984 he left the Crown and joined NAALAS where he remained until 1989. In March 1989 he went into private practice on his own, and initially operated his practice from his residence at Humpty



Dennis Norman

Doo. In 1991, he joined the firm of Loftus & Cameron, and (if my memory serves me correctly) represented that firm in Katherine for a period. There followed, as I recall, a short period where he practised on his own account again before he went into partnership with Ted Dunstan as Dunstan & Norman in 1992.

In July of 1993, he set up practice as a sole practitioner in Cavenagh St, Darwin and in March 1997, moved his practice out to Palmerston where it continued until last week.

Somuch of the history; what of the man? He was born just months before the onset of the Great Depression. He was a lad of 10 at the outbreak of World War II. He would have turned 70 next year. I had the honour of knowing Dennis only

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during his time in the Territory, but I am confident that the qualities I am about to mention were qualities that he had demonstrated throughout his nearly 50 years of service to the public.

Perhaps the most common description that I have heard of Dennis over the years is that he was a "gentleman". He was, in a sense, a link with a more refined and gracious age of the law. When he was first admitted as a practitioner the formal certificate of admission recorded that he was "called to the degree of an Utter Barrister of the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn". The terminology stands in stark contrast to the formula of words used in our court now, when one is admitted as a legal practitioner or, perhaps as a barrister and solicitor of the court. Dennis' manner was courteous, even courtly, though this did not prevent him from fighting vigorously and persistently in his client's interests.

The other quality I wish to mention – and it is perhaps the quality that I most admired in Dennis – was his loyalty. His loyalty, once given, was total and absolute. I had quite a bit to do with Dennis in the early 1980s, both professionally and at a personal level, and I am aware of a number of instances where Dennis was let down (and in some cases publicly embarrassed) by persons whose support he was entitled to expect. Nevertheless, because he perceived that he owed loyalty to those persons, he never, publicly or privately, criticised those persons or made any complaint about their conduct to any third person. Since he chose never to speak of those matters it is not appropriate that I should now go into any detail and I do not intend to do so.

Dennis Arthur Norman combined the qualities of gentlemanliness and loyalty with the practice of the law, and in that respect was a model for us all. The profession, and the Territory, are both the lesser for his passing."

*Peter Tiffin
2 July 1998*

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