

# The Artful Bar

*Clive Evatt, who combines his practice at the Bar with ownership of the Hogarth Gallery, reviews the Bar's eclectic art collection.*

The profession has long patronised the arts. Any evening at the Opera House sees a gathering of Bench and Bar. Judges of the Court of Appeal have a penchant for opera whereas the Equity Bench, in keeping with the jurisdiction, prefers more esoteric chamber music.

There is an even closer connection between Bar and stage. The funniest ever review compere was Roden. Waddy is also a riot in this field. However it is in dramatic art that the Bar shines. Those fortunate enough to have seen Rofe in "The Eagle has Two Heads" as he clutched the heroine to his bosom witnessed one of the great moments in theatrical history.

Every barrister has some interest in the visual arts. Many own at least one decent picture and some floors have a high standard of art in the common areas. There are fabulous private collections. The name most mentioned is Lockhart J but his collection would have to be good to rival the magnificent collections of Meagher or the late Tom Reynolds. Meagher's collection which is scattered all over Sydney would be big enough and good enough to refurbish the Art Gallery.

Although all three have given paintings to the Association it was Meagher and Reynolds who dramatically influenced the Bar collection by bringing members into contact with modern art.

Before Wentworth Chambers opened in 1957 there was no common room and nowhere to hold social functions. Donations were few. Sir George Rich holds the honour of presenting the Association with its first gift - a portrait of himself (since disappeared). Sir George was also responsible for the Association's second gift a year later when Barwick donated the President's chair now in the dining room under his portrait. Sir George had been reading in the Association library in the old Law School when his chair collapsed.

"...being somewhat shaken he accepted from the librarian a glass of spirits, which effected a sound restoration. His Honour jocularly submitted to Barwick, then President of the Association, a claim for damages which led to a good deal of humorous correspondence between them and an ultimate 'settlement' in the presentation of the maple chair. Barwick

sought a latinism for the chair and Mr. John Sparrow, warden of All Soul's College, Oxford was enlisted to supply the inscription: "Hic parumper requievit Georgius Rich donec lyacis laticibus suscitatus est", his translation being "Here George Rich reclined in rest until he was raised up by strong waters." (J M Bennett "A History of the New South Wales Bar" at 215).

In 1959 Snelling gave a portfolio of portraits of early English Judges (also missing). At that time the Association commissioned the artist Bill Pidgeon to paint the portraits of Barwick and Manning which hang over the refectory table at the top of the dining room. Mr. Pidgeon was better known as a cartoonist and has unduly emphasised, indeed exaggerated, their stern countenances. Those who trembled before Manning J when seeking an adjournment of one of his special fixtures must still shudder when they see this grim profile. Both of them deserve better. The artist has missed their true personalities which were far more amenable. They both worked tirelessly for the Bar and were the driving force behind Selborne-Wentworth Chambers.



*Mr. Pidgeon's Barwick*

black and white drawings was never really happy with paint. What should have been light-hearted is too sombre.

The collection ambled along with more legal portraits, photographs and the occasional etching. Thus in 1966 Cohen (Alroy) presented some framed portraits of English and NSW Judges, in 1970 Gee gave a photograph of the District Court Judges of 1929 and in 1972 a picture of Ralston was presented. This probably would have been the pattern of donations for the next 100 years when in 1973 out of the blue a large painting of an ostrich arrived. This is described in the catalogue thus:-

"...a hapless and enigmatic ostrich. It will evoke apt and cunning thoughts."

What induced Meagher, Hughes, Jeffrey, Lockhart and O'Keefe to give this picture by Terrence O'Donnell is not

known. It could be they were concerned at the way the collection was going and wanted to demonstrate that art could be contemporary and cheerful and need not have any particular meaning. On the other hand they may have won it in a raffle.

Over the next 10 years the ostrich was followed by eight further contemporary but non-legal pictures. Meagher and Reynolds were behind all these either alone or in association with other members - mainly 8 Selborne. This set the yardstick for 7 Selborne to give the Bill Salmon "Twist Trunk" in memory of Jeffrey J and an Eric Smith in memory of Henderson. The other floor to give a painting was 10 Wentworth who in 1984 appropriately donated "The Unexpected".

Although at the same time gifts of legal theme pictures, prints, photographs and engravings kept on arriving these were mostly shunted off to passageways, the archives trunk, boardroom or the Registrar's office.

The last picture presented was in May this year when 8 Selborne gave the Ian Pearson "Hunters and Collectors" in memory of Reynolds. The yellow spiral appears three dimensional because of the black shadows painted underneath. This trick of illusion was introduced into Australia by Tim Storrier. The painted tree branch motif was first used by Colin Lanceley. However despite its eclecticism it is a worthy and impressive painting. The deep waters of the pond lie still with a hint of mystery.

The common rooms today have an excellent and harmonious collection of traditional and modern art. The pictures blend well and make a lively collection. Art connoisseurs would recognise the quality of the paintings and even those members and visitors not so familiar with art would know the collection is out of the ordinary and unique for such a legal setting.

The jewel in the crown is "From David Jones' Window" (1936) - a drawing by Grace Cossington Smith (Yet another gift from Meagher and Reynolds and others of 8 Selborne). It shows Queens Square and Hyde Park Barracks then the District Court. Queen Victoria gazes serenely across Macquarie Street (she has since turned). People scurry by like spiders and altogether the picture captures the art deco charm of pre-war Sydney. Meagher and Reynolds purchased it in 1974 for only \$750 (price marked

on back). An absolute bargain. It would be worth at least \$15,000 on today's market (an increase of 2,000% which would rival Voss's superannuation fund profits).

Another first class painting is Euan McLeod's "Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen". This was not commissioned but came from an exhibition at Watters Gallery. At first glance it looks like a parody with garrish colours of green, yellow and black, but on closer examination the sitters emerge as real people with character. It is a superior portrait to Mr. Pidgeon's Barwick.

There is only one realist painting "Time Means Tucker" by Tim Storrier who is a skilled craftsman. You have to look closely to observe it is not a real flag but only painted.



"Hunters and Collectors"

In 1974 a painting by Geoffrey Proud caused such controversy it made the press. Untitled, it shows a lady unaware of Section 576 of the Crimes Act. It is described in the Inventory as :-

"A fine Renoirresque, soft, spray-gun painted work...a seductive example, in the neo-realist mode...comprehensible by the most benign barrister!"

According to the catalogue responsibility for this gift is shared by Meagher, Hope JA, Lockhart, McHugh, O'Keefe, Cripps, Morris, Poulos, Hely and Chapman.

The painting is not neo-realist at all but photo-realist. It resembles a photograph because it appears sharp from a distance and out of focus close up. It is not a good example because the central figure should remain sharp from all distances. Using Renoir's name in the description is questionable. It had many critics including Coombs (Janet) who retaliated by donating a painting depicting an undressed male. The Association rejected this on aesthetic grounds because the work was by an amateur artist and not competent enough. What would have happened had there been a gift of one of Juan Davila's highly professional homosexual paintings?

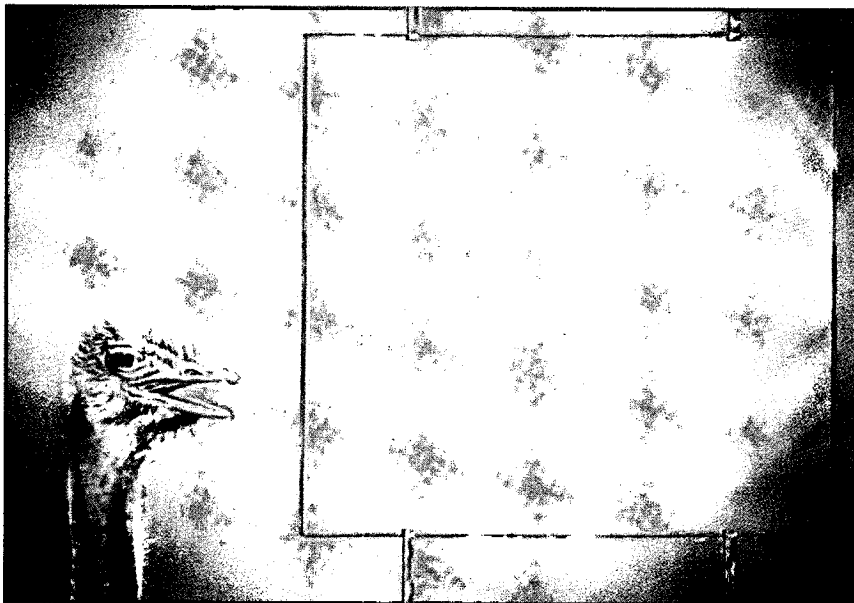
As the surrealist Magritte would have said, the picture is not a woman but only a painting. If females wish to protest at anything in the collection, the obvious one would be the photograph of Sir Frederick Darley donated in 1965 by Maxwell. Sir Frederick was Chief Justice of New South Wales in 1921 when our first woman Barrister, Miss Ada Evans, qualified for the Bar. He did not approve of women Barristers and refused to allow her to practice. Eventually the Holman Government had

to pass a special Act to enable her to appear in Court.

The painting by Mr. Proud ought to be taken in the context of the contemporary paintings which surround it. Artistically speaking, it does not warrant the attention it has received.

One way or the other, the Association has a significant and important art collection. It now needs direction and a curatorial policy. There is no space in the common areas for even one more painting. The few bare patches of wall which survive must remain to avoid the collection becoming too cluttered. As it is the passageways, back rooms and administration sections are overcrowded with pictures and photographs relegated from the common areas or not regarded as good enough or too small to be on public view. The Art Gallery of New South Wales gets rid of excess pictures by selling them. However the Association could place many of the overflow on loan to the floors or members.

The old photographs and prints are fascinating as are most of the legal paintings and portraits. Some could be lent to the Supreme Court to liven up the drab walls. The Federal Court obtains its excellent collection from Art Bank which only lends to Federal institutions. There is no similar State scheme. Perhaps the Geoffrey Proud could be placed on the 12th level where it could be more frequently seen especially by at least two of its donors.



".....out of the blue a large painting of an ostrich arrived."

As to the future acquisition of paintings the possibility of obtaining the name artists is out because of ridiculously high price levels. Today everyone is scrambling to buy paintings forcing prices up and up. It is reminiscent of the rush for shares on the New York Stock Exchange in the years leading up to October 1929. The only sensible policy is to obtain works by younger emerging artists and hope they will come good in years to come. This is exactly what Meagher and Reynolds had been doing. Predictions are always difficult but the Storrier and the Salvatore Zoffrea could become extremely valuable in time.

It is also recommended that pictures be rearranged every few years. New positioning and replacement makes any room look different. This is a policy adopted by public galleries to avoid any feeling of *déjà vu*.

Apart from pictures the Association has an excellent collection of furniture, silver, glass and other bric-à-brac.

The four Inns presented replicas of their Coats of Arms and historic stone relics. There is a purbeck marble base of a column

from the Round Church in the Temple which was placed there by the Knight Templars before 1185. A capital of one of the original columns of the choir dedicated in 1240 was also donated with a piece of the art of one of the Lancet windows of the organ bay of the Church and a carved pediment which formerly stood over the doorway of the students entrance to the library engraved Gray's Inn. These old stones are full of history and are aesthetically pleasing.

All types of sundry items have been donated such as a brass ashtray from HMAS Australia given by Bell, a ships bell from Wheelahan and Hartigan, a Sepic River Mask from the judges of the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea and a plaque from the US Navy given by Captain Phillips. There is a bust of W.C. Wentworth from the Nielsen Park Trust given by Snelling and a white bordered burgundy table runner and 24 napkins being a gift of the silks of 1985.

There are numerous sporting trophies. Four trophies for golf, a soccer trophy, a cricket trophy, a hockey trophy and a tennis trophy. None of these could be appraised because unfortunately they seem to be held by the competition.

The glassware was donated by Counsels Chambers and comprises Waterford tumblers, sherry glasses, wine glasses, champagne glasses (two dozen of each), an ice bucket and

a water jug. Altogether fourteen dozen glasses. Perhaps there should be a trophy related to their use which judging from the size of the collection would never be lost. In the catalogue the following remarks appear about a hole in one of the champagne glasses:-

"The defect...was discovered at a dinner in the boardroom when Norman Travers was pouring wine for Sir Garfield Barwick. The champagne spurted out in a most realistic fashion (cries of "Jamis boit de l'eau). Sir Garfield was intrigued and delighted and begged Norman to continue. However, we who deplored the waste of good wine, won the day. Waterfords replaced it."

There is an impressive collection of silver. The first gift in 1963 was a silver ice bucket, tongs and water jug from that machiavellian group, the Barristers Clerks.

There is a silver ducal butlers tray "Nec Male Notus Eques" (a knight of good repute) (c1789) donated by Mrs. Holmes in memory of Holmes J. Yeldham gave a silver cigar box with a

Bar crest and Samuels a Georgian silver cream jug and ladle. Meagher gave a silver dutch sweetmeat bowl and Gleeson four beautiful art deco silver menu holders. Altogether there are over forty donors and over 100 pieces. The collection is worth thousands. Unfortunately the silver and other smaller items such as glassware, cutlery and the like are locked away in drawers. They ought to be put on view in proper display cabinets. Some gifts of antique cabinets for this purpose would not go astray.

Donations of furniture include the boardroom table together with 18 chairs donated by Mr. H.D. Daley and the George IV longcase clock (c1820) donated by the silks of 1981 and 1982.

To date all gifts, including even Meagher's are on orthodox lines - paintings, silver, furniture and other objects d'art. The current collecting crazes for nostalgia such as old movie posters, costumes and particularly antique toys are not represented.

Who will be the first to donate a Schiparelli gown, a Steiff teddy bear or a Hornby 0-4-0 number 1 tank locomotive?

The blot on the escutcheon is the library collection. It was established in 1936 and started off in a room in Denman Chambers then moved to the top of University Chambers. Although the library had over two thousand books donated by Judges and Barristers it was never a success. Revenue came from a charge of threepence per book and from fines. Even though morning and afternoon tea was served and readers had the use of a telephone the library was seldom patronised. At one stage Tom the University Lift Driver was its custodian keeping the key in his pocket. Eve Coyle who was part-time librarian in the fifties used to complain that often days could go by without a visitor. It was Eve who found and supplied Sir George with the brandy when the chair collapsed.

In 1952 the library moved to Wentworth Chambers and remained thereafter in the complex. Although there have been many generous gifts, including the whole of the estate of Emerton, the Bar could have done much more.

The collection of legal memorabilia is disappointing to say the least. One would have expected for example, appeal books and transcript of leading cases. These would be invaluable to members as they could read how some of the great leaders of the

Bar presented and conducted cases, cross-examined and addressed. The comparatively small collection of items of historical interest is kept in only one tin box.

The box contains a wealth of absorbing items but there should be more. For example, there is a scrap album of press clippings tracing the career of Sydney's second woman Barrister, Sybil Morrison. A page from "The Sun" of 24 January 1926 has three photographs entitled "Mrs. Sybil Morrison, Sydney's Woman Barrister, in a corner of the kitchen, preparing the potatoes for dinner", "Ready for the court, picture taken before a tapestry in her home" and "The cup that cheers..Mrs. Morrison dispenses afternoon tea". These photographs are followed by a lengthy article:-

"Mrs. Morrison has been most successful during her 12 months at the Bar, and when she sheds her wig and gown she dons an apron to peel potatoes, or beat up cakes, and changes into taffetas for dinner, at which she makes a bright and charming hostess etc. etc."

There follows a clipping from "The Daily Guardian" of 25 February 1926 with the headlines "Two Portias ask for judgment" "Woman solicitor briefs woman Barrister". The article goes on:-

"Two Portias will make a magistrate blink at the Water Police Court this morning. Miss Jollie Smith a woman solicitor has briefed Mrs. Sybil

Morrison a woman barrister."

It is hoped that Mrs. Morrison received a better brief than those Miss Jollie Smith delivered to Counsel after the war.

The press clippings trace Mrs. Morrison's career for two years then cease abruptly in 1926. The remaining 30 pages in the album are blank. What happened? The yearly almanacs disclose moves to less fashionable Chambers and by 1936 her name disappeared altogether.

Other items in the box range from photographs of members making merry at the 50th anniversary ball of the Association in 1986 to a 1941 report on qualifications for appointment of King's Counsel.

There are sketches and humorous descriptions of silks in the early years of the century by Scarvel and a long poem by Letters



Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen - real people with character.



*Above: Mrs. Sybil Morrison, Sydney's woman barrister, in a corner of her kitchen, preparing the potatoes for dinner.*

*Right: Ready for the court, a picture taken before a tapestry in her home.*



“Elegy of the Bar”. This was written when the then Attorney General Lysaght (Labor of course) had incurred the wrath of the Bar by supporting a move for an amalgamation of the professions and abolition of wigs and gowns. Letters in rhyming couplets roast the Attorney and many of the leading barristers of the day who included Kitto, Holman, Windeyer, Toose, Watts and Lamb.

Herewith a few stanzas:-

“His Majesty’s Attorney General  
 (The New South Welsh one, not the Federal)  
 Who let the murd’rer walk, and hangs the Bar,  
 Demands th’ attention of our earliest par,  
 A giant in height, out of a meagre girth,  
 He stalks and booms as tho’ he owned the earth.  
 A feeble chin his thrusting beard off-sets  
 And scares the Crown to sending briefs to pets

.....  
 And Dignam master of a bogus college,  
 Whose dupes pay more than earns his legal knowledge

.....  
 Mack’s rocky practice hath declined of late,  
 The reason I would rather not relate

.....  
 When Hammond squeaks, E’en Jordan’s whine enthral  
 But Newell’s bleat like Mack’s dull drone appals”

Luckily there appear to be no Barrister poets around at the present time to write an up-to-date version of the above.

Members are urged to remember the various collections of the Association whenever the opportunity arises. □