

## Opening of Sir Anthony Mason Chambers

By Elpi Chrysostomou



L to R: David Elliott, Philip A Beale, Craig K Stewart, Matthew Vesper, The Hon Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE GBM, Lady Patricia, Elpi Chrysostomou, Philip Bates, John R Young, Ken Pryde, Mark Thompson

The application of the harmonising art of *feng shui* to barristers' chambers and life after the High Court were among other stories recounted recently by Sir Anthony Mason at the opening of the chambers named in his honour.

Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE GMB, former High Court chief justice, accompanied by his wife, Lady Patricia, were in Sydney on 25 July 2014 to formally open Sir Anthony Mason Chambers, Sydney.

Looking something akin to a busy Equity List in Court 11E, it was standing room only as the occasion was attended by members of the judiciary, New South Wales Bar Association, Law Society and artists and friends to hear Sir Anthony's speech.

Presiding as a High Court justice from pre-Whitlam and continuing to sit to this day in Hong Kong, Sir Anthony was a justice of the High Court during the most exciting and arguably most important era in Australian judicial

history. As the ninth chief justice of the High Court and a member of that court for a total of 23 years, Sir Anthony presided during a number of landmark cases including *The Tasmanian Dam Case* (1983) 158 CLR 1, *Teoh's Case* (1995) 183 CLR 273, *Dietrich v The Queen* (1992) 177 CLR 292, *Cole v Whitfield* (1988) 165 CLR 360, *Burnie Port Authority* (1994) 179 CLR 520, *Plenty v Dillon* (1991) 171 CLR 635, and of course *Mabo* (1992) 175 CLR 1.

In that connection, British aphorist, Geoffrey Madan, suggested that the destruction of ideas is much like the setting of a beautiful sunset. With the stoning of the *terra nullius* doctrine in *Mabo* and the pronouncement that native title had survived colonial settlement in 1788, our society was to some extent propelled into a new era. The sun had indeed set upon a doctrine, but it was about to rise on a new age of understanding of the First Australians and their deep historical and emotional relationship with the land and the

creatures physical and spiritual which inhabit it. Native title, it seemed, had survived like buried water in the bore of jurisprudence. It was the Sir Anthony High Court that revealed it.

It has been said that Sir Anthony is known, not only for his keen intellect, but also his wit. His persona in court has been described in the following words:

He said relatively little but was very good at progressing the business of argument. The combination of a commanding intelligence, vast experience, and an ability to convey by facial expression the fact that the shelf-life of an argument had expired made him very effective in that regard. At the same time he was good-humoured and encouraged even the most junior practitioners who had done their work.<sup>1</sup>

Philip Beale together with Scot Wheelhouse SC warmly welcomed Sir Anthony to the floor noting that it is Sir Anthony's intellectual rigour, understanding, encouragement and

Elpi Chrysostomou, 'Opening of Sir Anthony Mason Chambers'



The Hon Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE GBM



The Hon Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE GBM and Lady Patricia at the unveiling

tolerance to which the new members of Sir Anthony Mason Chambers would aspire.

The members of Sir Anthony Mason Chambers have decided to support local artists by providing a space in which their work can be displayed for sale at no charge to the artist. The chambers have the benefit of a constantly changing

array of Australian contemporary art, a notion and aesthetic which was much admired by Sir Anthony and Lady Patricia.

While Sir Anthony Mason has chambers named in his honour in Adelaide, being a local, it seemed fitting, inevitable even, that chambers would be named in his honour in Sydney.

It did not take long for Sir Anthony to open into his trademark intellect, wit and insightful observations, particularly about his recent experiences in Hong Kong. He noted the aesthetics in the new chambers in Hong Kong were not such a priority where the Feng Shui consultant need only look at an inappropriately located window for it to be bricked up from the inside.

'This, apparently, to prevent barristers fees from exiting the window and drifting down to the barristers on lower floors', he said.

Happily, noted Sir Anthony, 'There are, for the time being at least, no floors of barristers below these to drain your revenue in this inscrutable way. Thus, you may be able to keep your magnificent floor to ceiling windows providing harbour vistas without such penalties to your finances.'

A relief to all, no doubt. At the conclusion of his address, Sir Anthony was invited to unveil a plaque on the floor to commemorate the occasion.

While Sir Anthony previously attended chambers shortly after its state of the art renovations, and continues to remain in contact with the floor, true to form, Sir Anthony noted that he 'looked forward to visiting chambers on occasions otherwise than in the capacity of a client.'

Those at Sir Anthony Mason Chambers look forward to it too and extend their heartfelt thanks to Sir Anthony for his generous support in allowing the chambers to be named after him.

## Endnotes

1. David Jackson, *Personalia*; Sir Anthony Mason AC, KBE (1995) 69 ALJ 610/ Kristen Walker.