

Reception for the Australian Law Librarians Association  
Address by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC  
Administrator of the Northern Territory  
Government House, 2 September 2009

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Chief Justice, Judges, Professor Dal Pont, distinguished guests, welcome to Government House and for visitors to Darwin and the Northern Territory for the first time - a special welcome. I acknowledge the Larrakia people and their ancestors, traditional owners of the land on which this gracious house stands.

Law libraries have been witness to some events of great significance to the Territory. It was in the Library at the Old Supreme Court that on 7 May 1968 the Law Society of the Northern Territory was formed on a motion by Ron Withnall, seconded by his then daughter-in-law Nerolie Withnall. Ron became a much admired inaugural President of the Law Society.

It was following a meeting of a nascent Library Committee that I was instructed to lobby Justice Lionel Murphy, then Senator and Attorney General, for more money in order to acquire some up-to-date texts for the shelves. This was partly successful and a new, substantial text appeared on the shelves of the impossibly cramped library at the Old Supreme Court in Alice Springs. It was Marsden's *On Collisions at Sea*, a definitive text not of immediately obvious value in Central Australia. Yes, there is the annual regatta established by the Alice Springs Meteorological Bureau in 1962, run in the dry Todd riverbed; and for some years the Alice Springs Yacht Club competed in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. But in the days when we only had one resident Judge and that Judge was often in Alice Springs, it was essential that any eventuality be covered.

Ian Barker, Queen's Counsel, was sitting in this library one day, waiting for a jury to return a verdict. There was an open door looking into the back yard where there was a demountable in which the jury were deliberating. As Ian turned to the index of *On Collisions at Sea*, the door to the jury room flew open and a man was punched out of the door onto the ground. The foreman of the jury then dragged him back into the jury room and slammed the door shut. Within minutes it was announced that a verdict had been reached. It was possibly because of this incident that Sir William

Forster subsequently advised juries at the first break to choose a foreman *by any democratic means short of violence*.

Adjacent to the library in Alice Springs was the courtroom. In 1975, during an adjournment of a plea in a criminal case, the Sheriff mentioned to me complaints from jurors that the jury box was too cramped. So I entered the jury box to see for myself. There was a prisoner in the dock and beside him a court orderly. There was a court recorder and a prison officer and a robed barrister, Ted Skewes, sitting at the bar table reading some notes.

Suddenly a man rushed in brandishing a dilapidated semi automatic bolt action 22. He had a grievance against a lawyer named Peter Dean and had earlier threatened to kill him. He shouted *where is that Dean? Where is Dean? Are you Dean?* Or words to that effect and then shot Mr Skewes in the back. The projectile passed through him and hit the bar table, leaving a permanent groove and Mr Skewes on the floor under the table. He reloaded and fired a second shot which grazed the dock and ricocheted off the wall. The orderly did a swan dive under the table and the prisoner ducked. Because the jury box was indeed cramped, I had nowhere to go. The gunman came towards me. He was attempting to reload but the bolt action jammed. Should I jump upon him and disarm him? Suddenly a thought came into my head. *That's not Peter Dean* I said. Prus, the name by which the gunman was known looked shocked. *Sorry* he said *why you not tell me?* He was soon after disarmed and taken away.

Why am I telling you all this? Well, the bar table with the bullet groove became the library table when the new Supreme Court was built. Generations of lawyers, local and visiting, sit there blissfully unaware that law libraries themselves can tell many more stories than the dry pages of Marsden's *On Collisions at Sea*. And how these libraries have evolved; I am unreliably informed that I could now fit all of Butterworth's Series on a USB memory stick. That might be right but why would you want to?

Having left the law to become Administrator, I have acquired a different sort of library, histories of the Territory such as *Cyclones. Floods and Flaming Furies*. Some attractive leather bound volumes have, however, come with me, including William Hudson's celebrated work *A Treatise of the Court of Star Chamber*. I didn't

have time to enjoy it when at the bar. Now I am the head of Executive Council, it has some attractions – but I won't go there. Instead, I must say how pleased I am to see you here. Frieda has put together a very interesting program - including the *Name the Monkey Competition!* I wish you both well and welcome.