

Parramatta Courthouse

Your Honours

Your Honour's Court is the first District Court to sit in the new building forming part of the complex known as the Parramatta Justice precinct. It is pleasing and fitting that it be Your Honour given the significant part that you have played in reducing the backlog and delays in criminal cases here at Parramatta.

This complex was opened by the Premier, the Honourable Morris Iemma MP on 20th February 2008. Also present was the attorney general and the director-general of the attorney general's department as well as members of the judiciary, many other dignitaries and invited guests. I was not one of those.

This courthouse is the 5th building to have been used for the dispensing of civil and criminal Justice in Parramatta since the arrival of the first fleet. I have excluded here reference to the Family court and the Children's Court and the occasional sittings by Justices of the peace at Parramatta Gaol.

Parramatta's first courthouse was opened by Governor Arthur Phillip in 1791. However, it was demolished in 1826 due to the bad condition of the building, it was falling down on the litigants. The bench in those days obviously had no need to throw the book at anyone. The Parramatta district then used a rented building for courthouse business.

In 1837 the foundation stone was laid for a new courthouse. This courthouse was designed by Mortimer Lewis and built on the

corner of Church and George Streets, where an office building and the Kathmandu shop are now situated.

The building was made from stone and had a fancy iron railing fence along the street. The courthouse was also used for political meetings, church services, and the police station and lock-up. Extensions to the building were made in 1853, and it was used until 1891. After being demolished, the four pillars of that courthouse were used as part of the Boer War Memorial in Parramatta Park and are still there.

Another courthouse was opened in 1896 on the corner of George and Marsden Streets, the former site of a hotel. In the 1940s, a new courtroom and other offices were added, but a bigger courthouse was eventually needed. Some of the stone and stone carvings from the demolished building now grace the entrance to a private estate of an obviously wealthy resident of Wiseman's Ferry. Some of the stone still forms part of the wall that can be seen in the laneway beside the Court. The tower standing directly outside the main doors of the old courthouse across the road was the corner of and dominant part of the edifice of the 1896 Courthouse. Significantly, and unlike this Court, it bears the British Coat of Arms.

The new courthouse and police station was opened in 1974, that which is situated across the road. Interestingly that Courthouse was opened on 8 November 1974 by the then Governor Sir Roden Cutler VC KCMG CBE KStJ in the presence of John Maddison MLA, the then Minister of Justice. That was of course in the days when the government and community still paid regard to the

sovereignty of the Queen and we still had Knights. Notwithstanding the changes in view people are still prosecuted by us in the name of her majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

That courthouse has been in continuous use ever since, 34 years, except for perhaps the day in November 2006 when a petrol driven cleaning machine succeeded in gassing 13 people, although they fortunately did not die from its poisonous effect. One hopes there will be no similar episodes in this building.

This building is said to be the most secure Courthouse in Australia. That, I suppose, is reassuring given the changing nature of the threats to national and personal safety in Australia. One wonders, however, if it is so secure, why we see scores of Police standing or walking around the precinct every day but that is not for me to question.

I would, however, like to think that the quality of this Court building, the much better facilities for the judiciary and the litigants that it provides, will produce continued efficiencies, less delay and, more importantly, but so often overlooked by the emphasis on counting beans these days, better quality of justice.

That is something that the Crown Prosecutors, the Director of Public Prosecutions and his Solicitors and staff are committed to, not the achieving of results but the achieving of quality results, namely the achievement of justice.

We collectively wish, Your Honour, your brother and sister Judges of the District Court, the Magistracy, and, hopefully, more of the

Justices of the Supreme Court, continued success in the dispensing of Justice in this new Courthouse.

May it please the Court.