

## DR KEITH SWAN

### Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*)

Keith Swan's friends and colleagues are accustomed to regarding him as the quintessential Riverina man. It consequently comes as a surprise to discover he was born in Sydney and educated in Armidale! But his roots are in the Murray River town of Corowa, where his paternal grandmother's family settled in the 1850s.

Keith's father, born there in 1887, became a teacher, so the family led a peripatetic existence, which must have given piquancy to the elder Swan's nostalgic tales of the Riverina in earlier days. He was especially fond of relating how, as a fifteen or sixteen year old youth in the Corowa town band, he had been patted on the head by our first prime minister, Sir Edmund Barton, and advised to restrict his drinking to lemonade. Later, he recalled a civic visit to Wagga, where he was hosted by the builder Charles Hardy, whose son, Senator Charles Hardy Jr, was to achieve notoriety as the charismatic leader of the Riverina (New State) Movement in the 1930s.

Raised amidst such stirring pastifying, is it any wonder that Keith Swan should feel a special affinity with the Riverina region?

His consciousness of the significance of regional sentiment would also have been reinforced by residence in Armidale. His secondary schooling and teachers' college studies took place against the backdrop of on going regional agitation.

Led by those Country Party titans, David Drummond, Earle Page and Michael Bruxner, the New England separatist movement demonstrated it was an altogether more formidable force than its Riverina counterpart. A tangible symbol of its leaders' success in canalising regionalism for political ends was the Armidale Teachers' College, established at Drummond's initiative during 1927 in an imposing building on the most commanding site in the city.

There Keith undertook his teacher training course in 1934-5. He then taught at Newcastle and Narrabri before joining the RAAF Meteorological Service in 1941. Demobilised as a Flight Lieutenant in 1946, he satisfied a long-standing ambition by enrolling at the University of Sydney. He won the Evening Students' Association History Prize in 1947, and graduated from the history honours course with a good II, in 1950.

That year he was appointed to a lectureship at the recently established Wagga Wagga Teachers' College. His University supervisor, Professor John M Ward, proposed he write an MA on some local topic. But Keith, believing promotion would require another transfer after several years, decided to continue working on early Australasian contacts with the New Hebrides. In retrospect he judged this decision a mistake. His sources were in city libraries, which he could only visit during vacations, making for slow progress and a lack of continuity in research. He nevertheless was awarded his MA in 1958.

By then his interest in Riverina studies had been well and truly whetted: partly by his involvement in a short-lived revival of Wagga's local historical society, and partly by his travels throughout the region. Those who turn to any of Keith's thirteen books and monographs will immediately be struck by his acute sensitivity to landscape and place. They will perhaps not so readily recognise how much even the slightest of these writings owes to his mastery of original sources. And they certainly will not appreciate the vital part he himself played in the collection and preservation of those sources.

His collecting began when he was entrusted with papers from several 'early families of the city and district'. They provided a nucleus for the archives of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society, which Keith re-established in 1962. His first monograph, commemorating the centenary of public education in Wagga, had been published the previous year; and thereafter his teaching, research and writing went hand-in-hand with his collecting. In collaboration with Teachers' College colleagues, he founded the Institute of Riverina Studies in 1966, and mapped out an ambitious program of research and publication.

His *History of Wagga Wagga*, published in 1970, was widely acknowledged as a seminal piece of local history. Breaking with long-standing tradition, his book surveyed Aboriginal as well as white society, treated the city as the centre of a functional region, and placed local issues in a national historiographical context.

In 1972, he was appointed senior lecturer in history at the new Riverina College of Advanced Education. The following year he became Acting Dean of its School of Business and Liberal Studies; a post he afterwards held substantively. In the 1974 New Year Honours he received the British Empire Medal for services to education and local history; and in 1976 served as Deputy Principal of Riverina College.

Several years earlier, he and his librarian wife Vera had persuaded the College to form a Riverina Collection, housing both archival material, and printed sources from the superb working library of Margaret Carnegie, a local historian and celebrated collector of Australian art, who at that time lived near Holbrook. Following his retirement, he agreed to a suggestion by the College Principal, Dr Cliff Blake, that he accept a consultancy and continue to oversee the Collection's development. After visiting archives and manuscript libraries in Britain and America, he responded by proposing the Riverina Collection be split up. The printed materials would henceforth be known as the Margaret Carnegie Collection since, despite having Riverina material, the Carnegie library fundamentally comprised Australiana. The Riverina Collection's archives and manuscripts would meanwhile be managed independently. The College Council acted on this advice, establishing what proved to be the first autonomous archives in any College of Advanced Education, and laying the foundation for Australia's finest collection of original source material relating to a single region.

If we had to identify just one of Keith's achievements, the foundation of our Regional Archives would alone be sufficient to warrant conferring this award today.

Mr Chancellor, I take great pleasure in commending to you Keith John Swan for conferral of the award Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*).

**Dated this Seventh Day of April One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Five**