

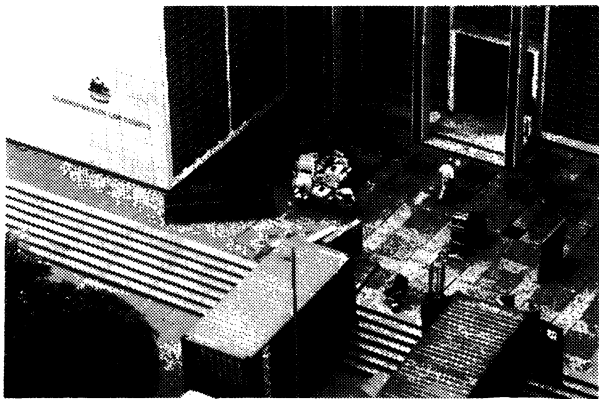
BALANCE

LAW SOCIETY NORTHERN TERRITORY

SORRY, WE DON'T OPEN ...

The building which made headlines at its official opening with the "beer waiter" joke has had its day. Although it was never a pretty building, and some are not sad to see it go, many practitioners have watched it tumble down and recalled the days when they cut their teeth in what was once the Supreme Court.

When it was built in the 1960s the old Supreme Court provided jurists with a reprieve from the dust and heat of previous



Trucks are loaded up with the contents of the building: eleven containers have been sent to East Timor.

locations, marking the end of what has been called the Territory's legal "tin shed era". Thirty years later the dust is still settling from the bulldozers and jack hammers. The future of the site will be watched with interest.

The official opening of the building in June 1964 was attended by the Commonwealth Attorney General the late Sir Billy Sneddon and other top legal figures. The occasion became famous for the practical joke played on the Andor Meszaros sculptor "The Judge".

Some time the night before the official ceremony "The Judge" was fitted with a beer can and drink-waiter's towel. The joke

featured on the front page of the Northern Territory News with the headline "Sorry, we don't open until four."

One of the characteristics noted about the old court building was its leaky roof. Speaking at the opening of the new Supreme Court in 1991 Mr John Stirk, then President of the Law Society reminisced about the experience of Sir William Forster during criminal sittings in 1975:

"It rains a lot in February and it was only two months after Cyclone Tracey. A less than dignified picture emerges: His Honour sat in his chambers, with his feet on his desk, because the roof of the court leaked to such an extent that he had six inches of water on the floor. Incidentally, if Federal Court judges are casting a covetous eye on that building, might I remind them that the roof still leaks," said Mr Stirk.

Another incident involving the building was the looting of His Honour Sir William Foster's chambers following Tracey.



And it all came tumbling down: the old Supreme Court building, renowned for its leaky roof and a life well spent as a servant of justice.

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JUSTICE ATE ME

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regarding the direction and future priorities in the strategic plan went well into the afternoon.

One of the important matters to arise was the need for the Society to develop new income streams into the future. To that end we must consider securing our own premises. At the moment the Law Society leases premises from the Government at extremely attractive rates for which we are very grateful. However, it cannot be presumed that the circumstances in which that arrangement has been maintained will continue to apply beyond the expiry of the proposed new lease (to be signed in March). The profession has to accept that to govern itself in an environment of independence it has to have facilities that provide it with an identity as well as a permanent home. Inevitably, that means money, and the money will have to come from the profession. I can hear the grumblings already. We have to come to grips with the fact that it is necessary to begin to fashion our future now.

Another issue that we need to get onto right away is the manner in which this legal community intends to celebrate the centenary of Federation in 2001. Some suggestions include putting together a publication of the history of the legal profession in the Territory over the last one hundred years that would include excerpts of oral history and writings of people who are presently in practice or have practised here in the past. Perhaps the commissioning of a work of art to be donated to the Supreme Court. Perhaps both. I don't know. You may have better ideas. Whatever we do it has to be put in train soon.

The *Legal Practitioners Amendment Act* and in particular those provisions relating to the adoption of the national model conduct rules as regulations have attracted some comment of late that has led the Society to request that the legislation not go before the house until April. That delay will enable the legislation to be further considered by the profession. So please take the opportunity to do so. It is your profession.

SORRY, WE DON'T OPEN ...

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"Judicial wigs and robes were the ill gotten gains. His Honour's scarlet robe was later spotted in the main street by a policeman. It was draped around a young woman, who said someone had given it to her. One presumes it was not His Honour. The robe was promptly returned, as were the wigs," said Mr Stirk.

As it happened, the Commonwealth did cast eyes over the court building, and the Commonwealth Law Courts moved there in 1994 following a major refurbishment to ensure its suitability for the Family and Federal Courts.

According to Mr Brendan McKeon, Client Services Officer who worked at the Commonwealth Law Courts, the roof did still leak, but "only on the very odd occasion."

The law courts remained there for five years until their recent move to facilities in the TCG building in Mitchell St. An announcement that the building would be closed for good was then made.

Controversy followed the building's closure, with some Darwin residents protesting against the building's demolition. Supporters claimed the building was among the first permanent structures in Darwin, that it had historical value and should be protected.

Their pleas went unheeded and demolition began on Sunday 13 February 2000.



NT Legal Aid's Sally Rush and Richard Coates, resting on the witness box before it was loaded into a container bound for East Timor.

Prior to the building's removal, a busy team orchestrated by NT Legal Aid and the Law Society's Liz Morris spent two hectic days removing the entire contents of the building, including three complete court rooms, packing them into containers to be sent to East Timor.

A total of eleven containers in all were rescued, including the witness box used by Lindy Chamberlain when the building was still the Supreme Court.

Legal Aid's Sally Rush told *Balance* of the work involved.

"NT Legal Aid Director Richard Coates contacted the Territory Government who said we could have the furniture if we could get it out before the contractors came in to demolish the building."

"I contacted UNTAET here and arranged to get removalists in — we were being pressured to get the stuff out in two days so it was touch and go whether UNTAET would get approval from East



Courtesy of the Northern Territory News.

FERAE NATURAE

There is more to the Law Society Northern Territory than corporate images new or old. Scratch beneath the surface and you will find the changes have come after a solid year of hard work and achievement by your members on Council and the many other legal practitioners who have devoted their limited time to serving on Law Society committees — indeed it is the voluntary commitment of these members that has been crucial in strengthening the capacity of the Society to serve its broader membership.

So what's been happening?

Attendance at a day long corporate planning meeting in January would more than answer your query but I intend to save you the tedium, especially when many of you have survived corporate hug-ins of your own.

The achievements of the Law Society broadly fall into four categories.

On the national front, a draft bill for the travelling practising certificate is available for comment. This important initiative comes after seminars in Darwin and Alice Springs considered changes being contemplated all over Australia by the legal profession. After the introduction of the travelling certificate more consideration needs to be given to deregulation and multi-disciplinary practices.

At home the profile and awareness of the services provided by the Law Society has been raised among the Northern Territory profession and the wider community. The record response of the profession to the opening of the legal year in both Alice Springs and Darwin is a reflection of this broadened engagement by our membership.

The Law Society's regulatory role has been consolidated by efficient use of the internal complaints system with improvements to come following a review of that system that is underway.

The real key to the Law Society's success has been the formation of eight new committees.

These committees, particularly the Access to Justice Committee, the Commercial Committee and the Legal Structure Committee have become crucial to the proactive representation of the profession's interests and the reinvigoration of the Society's functions.

The work of the newly formed Information Technology Committee must also be noted and will be obvious to all when the Law Society's website is officially launched during Law Week this year.

These achievements come on top of efficiency improvements in the secretariat's core business of licensing, information distribution, maintenance



Maria Ceresa, Executive Officer

of data bases and the serving of the Law Society's agencies.

There is so much still to achieve. Strategies are under way to ensure the Law Society becomes even more relevant to its members.

A concrete illustration of this approach is the calibre of the speakers the Law Society has engaged to advise the NT legal profession on the GST at seminars in Alice Springs and Darwin. John Morgan, a Melbourne-based partner at Blake Dawson and Waldron and James Johnson a GST nuts-and-bolts specialist also from Melbourne promise to fathom (or at least explain in depth) the mystery surrounding the new tax system.

A subsidy is available to practitioners who need to travel from remote centres to attend these seminars.

Next month I will have done 12 months with the Law Society. I have yet to be informed as to what my three offences were but it is highly possible that in this case the punishment fits the crime.

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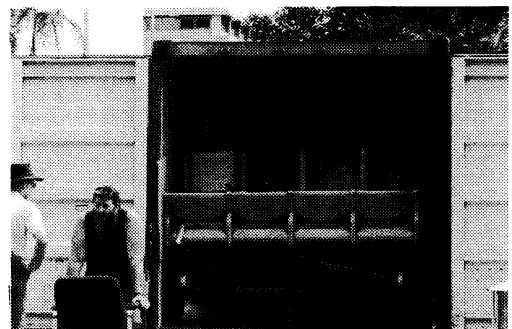
Timor in time. I had the army standing by to assist in the event that approval didn't come through within the time," said Ms Rush.

"The entire contents of the building were removed by the skin of our teeth, including the three court rooms which were dismantled so that they could be fitted into containers," she said.

"Containers had to be used as there was no other way of securing the furniture on arrival in East Timor and

making sure that it went to the people it was intended for — the judiciary.

"Nine containers are on their way and two more are to go shortly — it sounds corny but it really was a race against time and a pretty daunting task! It was very gratifying to have managed to get it done," said Ms Rush.



Some of the furniture that will be used by the judiciary and the public in East Timor.