



SPEECH

ADDRESS AT THE WELCOME TO HIS HONOUR JUSTICE SIMON STEWARD, JUDGE OF THE HIGH COURT, ON MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2021

BY CHRISTOPHER BLANDEN QC, PRESIDENT OF THE VICTORIAN BAR COUNCIL

May it please the court.

I appear on behalf of the Victorian Bar to congratulate Your Honour on your appointment to this Court.

I too acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Your Honour's appointment to this Court comes after distinguished service at the Bar and the Federal Court of Australia to which Your Honour was appointed in February 2018.

As has been noted Your Honour attended Xavier College and the University of Melbourne obtaining first class honours and winning Exhibitions in Philosophy and History.

Life as a practitioner began at Mallesons.

You quickly found your way into the Taxation Group. That involvement really set the direction for your Honours career thereafter.

When you came to the Bar you set about developing a substantial revenue practice and appeared both as preferred junior and then Silk, in many well known cases.

When asked, friends and colleagues nominate 'fastidious planning and preparation' as standout elements in your Honours approach, not just to opinions and later judgments, but all matters.

Sometimes however planning and preparation can be taken too far. I am able to confirm that your Honour has been sailing...at least once. Notwithstanding that the sail involved a fairly gentle navigation of the sheltered waters of Port Phillip Bay, I am reliably informed that your Honour arrived fully kitted out as if embarking on a Sydney -Hobart with a storm warning, much to the mirth of the skipper and your companions.



'Generosity of spirit' is another recurring theme.

At the Bar your Honour was a regular visitor to the chambers of others with whom you shared, checking up and encouraging a collegiate atmosphere.

Your Honour continued this habit in the Federal Court and paid numerous pastoral visits to the chambers of fellow judges to maintain the spirit and collegiality of chambers.

On many occasions the fastidious preparation and generosity combined. A BBQ for judges and staff in the Federal Court was the perfect opportunity for your Honour to demonstrate your natural gift and flair for pastoral care. The Fed Court insignia was copied and it and the name of the judicial recipients, embroidered onto chef's aprons which were duly distributed. I'm told they are now collectors items. However an attempt by you to assist with some preparatory knife work caused deep concern to your colleagues, who only breathed a sigh of relief when you were persuaded to surrender the knife.

Of course no welcome for your honour would be complete without reference to your Honour's propensity for collection. Books, antiques, clothes, art, curios. None have escaped your attention.

Indeed so well known is this propensity that The Australian newspaper, when announcing your appointment to this court fulsomely described your Honour thus "*A tax expert from Melbourne with a love of antique furniture*".

Your Honour's dress and sense of style has also been the subject of much favourable comment. The two descriptors that figure most prominently are 'eclectic' and 'Harris Tweed'. Your Honour takes pride in the fact that you do not own a pair of jeans.

Of course those light hearted aspects tend to distract from the more readily given descriptions such as scholar, great intellect, incredibly widely read, having a passion for history, strongly independent, a huge work ethic and a believer in service to the community.

Late last year, after your appointment, your Honour featured in 2 very different publications. But the publications say much about your Honour and the way you are regarded by others.

The first was the Summer edition of the Victorian Bar News. It reprinted an Advice your Honour had written for the Bar Council some years earlier. The question? "What happens to QC's when the Queen dies?"



Your Honour's consideration of the topic commenced with the origins of the rank under Elizabeth 1 in about 1594. It continued thru 30 fulsome paragraphs, with 33 comprehensive footnotes, to it's ultimate conclusion – "They become KC's"

The second publication was the Xavier News of December 2020. In honouring your appointment the author reflected the sentiment that so many have expressed. He said simply "We don't mind saying that we are absolutely chuffed".

On behalf of the Victorian Bar, I wish Your Honour a long, satisfying and distinguished service as a Judge of this Court.

May it please the Court.