

**Tribute to
The late Professor GAVIN BROWN AO
Memorial Service
18 February 2011
The Great Hall
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

Vice Chancellor Dr Michael Spence

Professor Stephen Garton

Ms Diane Ranck

Mr Colin Brown, dear family members and friends of Professor Brown

Mr David Gonski AC Chancellor of the University of New South Wales

Mr Fred Hilmer AO Vice-Chancellor

Other distinguished guests

Academic and staff colleagues of the University

Fellows of Senate

The University of Sydney Graduate Choir

Alumni, students and friends

It is indeed a privilege to share some thoughts on the life of Professor Gavin Brown, distinguished mathematician, outstanding Vice-Chancellor of this University, humanist, friend to many.

Dr Spence has noted some of the very significant contributions of Professor Brown to the University during his 12 year term as Vice-Chancellor, those years of massive change, requiring visionary but strong and pragmatic leadership.

Reserved in demeanour, he had nevertheless an exceptional capacity to see deeply into the potential character, and the ability of those around him, and entrust them with the high responsibility of which he believed them capable.

After all, following impressive years of undergraduate and graduate study in Scotland, he himself had been appointed at the age of only 33 years to the Chair of Pure Mathematics at the University of New South Wales. The prestigious awards of the Sir Edmund Whittaker Memorial Prize and the Australian Mathematical Society Medal were followed by his election as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, and, Visiting Professorships at the Universities of Paris, of Cambridge, and of Washington.

His subsequent years, first as Deputy Vice-Chancellor and then as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide are considered to have brought about many positive initiatives in administration, and a significant extension of the University's links to the wider community.

His subsequent appointment spanning 12 years at this University as Vice-Chancellor has been acknowledged by Dr Spence. This University can never forget the legacy of his wise leadership.

As well as the major academic, administrative and research developments which were achieved under the leadership of Gavin Brown, the wider cultural life of the University also grew and flourished.

The Koori Centre and the Brain and Mind Institute were established with his valuable encouragement. The substantial population of our international scholars was not only integrated with a genuine sense of care, but valuable bonds were forged with universities from their country of origin, (particularly the People's Republic of China and India). I can never forget his generous support of initiatives to establish ties of support with the medical faculties of Vietnam at a time following the war when they were denied access to the West. However, the Australia Vietnam medical foundation developed such valuable ties in collaborative medical education and research that it is known and esteemed at the highest level in Vietnam.

During his Principalship, the arts grew and flourished – the Sydney University Symphony Orchestra, with students drawn from all Faculties, the Renaissance Players, the Sydney University Opera Company who reached extraordinary heights of performance in difficult works such as Britten's *Turn of the Screw*; The Rock Group and Choirs. And certainly the debating and the sports teams – all these elements adding enrichment to the student experience. Indeed he could quietly identify with the students in all these areas, and although a keen follower of most sports, he was known to derive enormous delight in backing a winning racehorse.

On learning of his untimely death on Christmas Day last, words of sorrow and gratitude were expressed by so many of the students of his period here.

One young alumna, former student Fellow of Senate, a former President of the Students' Representative Council wrote:

“Professor Brown was an omnipresent influence and a larger than life figure,...a much loved figure among the whole student body ..

If University plays a major role in one's development, then the influence of Professor Brown on my own, cannot be underestimated”.

And many would echo those words.

The writer also recalled an edition of Honi Soit (the student newspaper) which I quote verbatim, had taken “a particular fancy to a report of the Vice-Chancellor published in The University News. Professor Brown's substantial wit, intelligence and unique way with words was lovingly mocked by Honi Soit as a potential LSD i.e. hallucinatory experience”!

Some of the students were affronted by this audacity. But—and I quote again – “Far from taking offence, the Vice-Chancellor not only found the suggestion hilarious, he sent a note of appreciation to the Editors”.

But there were times also of considerable personal sadness and loss – the death of his wife Barbara, partner and support of so many years.

But later, the entry into his life of Diané, brought a new joy and companionship that lifted the spirits of all.

Vale Gavin Brown, Vice-Chancellor
Generous spirit
We thank you
We shall never forget you

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO
Chancellor