

General Sir William Riddell Birdwood

The degree of Doctor of Laws* was conferred ad eundem gradum upon General Sir William Riddell Birdwood by the Chancellor Sir William Cullen at a ceremony held in the Great Hall at 3.00pm on Tuesday 27 April 1920.

General Birdwood, who was Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Forces for much of the First World War, was visiting Australia as the guest of the Commonwealth Government.

** As there was no provision in the University Act until 1952 for conferring of honorary degrees by the University of Sydney, the University awarded a number of degrees 'ad eundem gradum' - mostly Doctor of Laws - as a mark of special honour. Those who received this award included members of the Royal Family, Governors-General, distinguished soldiers and leaders of industry.*



photo, The Chronicle, 14 February 1920, National Library of Australia

Report

The Chancellor, having formally conferred the degree, called for three cheers for the General. These were given with great heartiness, merging into insistent calls from the undergraduates of "Speech! Speech!"

The Chancellor said, "No. The General only came amongst us on the promise that there should be no speeches."

But as the undergraduates only laughed at this and roared "Speech" still more loudly, Sir William came forward to the front of the dais. "Members of the University of Sydney and undergraduates," he said. "When your Chancellor said there were to be no speeches I entirely agreed. But seeing so many of my old comrades among you I certainly want to say how greatly I appreciate the honour of the degree conferred upon me. It has been a great privilege to me to see how many of you are returned soldiers, and the fact that these are members with me of this University enhances the honour very much indeed. You have been informed that I had already been made a Doctor by Cambridge. To me that was a great honour, for it made me the sixth of my family to become a Doctor of that University."

General Birdwood went on to suggest that much good would be done in the field of education by arranging for an interchange of masters and pupils between Australia and Great Britain. "As for those among you who, while on service, saw something of the old land," he added, "I do hope you will do your best to make others realise the tremendous efforts made by the people of Britain during a war in which they fought with the sole

object of assuring that their country should remain free for ever." (Applause.)

Subsequently many graduates and undergraduates who had served in the AIF were introduced to General Birdwood.

From The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 April 1920.