

***The Toast to the Town***

**At the University of Melbourne's 2005 Town & Gown Dinner  
Wednesday 31 August 2005.**

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Thank you John McFarlane for that generous toast from the town.

Chancellor Ian Renard  
The Honourable John Brumby, Treasurer, Victoria,  
Senator the Honourable Kay Patterson  
The Honourable Mary Delahunty  
The Honourable Andre Haermayer  
Distinguished guests and colleagues - the world of talent in this room –

For 15 years, the great Melbourne tradition of a Town and Gown dinner inhabited the neo-gothic splendour of Ormond College – high table meets Harry Potter, warm open fireplaces and dark wooden panelling on a mid-winter night.

This year, we decided to invade a part of the Town – but a very familiar space.

For the Melbourne Museum is among the many cultural bodies with ancient ties to the University.

From 1856, the Museum was located on the University's Parkville campus. Indeed, notes one history, the National Museum of Victoria 'attracted more visitors to the university in the next four decades than did any of [the University's] other activities'.

Today the presence of the museum on campus is a distant memory. Only a few fragments of the original building survive, incorporated into the Union building. The Museum eventually escaped to Swanston Street until, some 150 years after its foundation, came to rest in this magnificent structure.

In making that journey, the Museum joined an array of cultural institutions that started on campus but soon found a bigger stage -

the Melbourne Theatre Company;  
Melbourne University Publishing;  
the Ian Potter Museum of Art;  
the Grainger Museum;  
and the medical history museum.

Thus the story of the University is intertwined with the cultural history of this city.

Redmond Barry, founder and Chancellor of the University, also founded the Melbourne Library. He was followed, decades later, as Library President by our our present Chancellor, Ian Renard. Distinguished former Vice-Chancellor Professor David Penington was President of the Museum throughout the construction and opening of this new building.

So it is fitting we meet here since a museum, like a university, is a place that brings together arts and science.

Arts *and* science – the double helix of intellectual life, the very first faculties established at the University of Melbourne, the twin currents that have flowed without interruption between town and gown for more than a century.

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The Melbourne of 1853 was a small city with a big vision, willing to build huge parliament houses, public institutions, grand residences and graceful streets, keen to found a university at a time when the population barely reached 80,000.

Under southern skies, watched over by the Greek Goddess Nike and inspired by a Latin motto drawn from Horace, the new University of Melbourne was commanded by the city to become a centre of learning, a place to be esteemed by future generations.

From 16 students in the first class to 42,000 students in 2005, the University now offers accounting to zoology and everything inbetween.

Parkville is no longer enough – the University has burst across Grattan Street, to occupy a campus now larger than 25 city blocks.

As Australians we often assume that excellence is elsewhere, never here at home.

Yet Melbourne has a medical school ranked by the *Times* of London as number 14 in the world. Here is a law school judged by international citation counts as the most influential in the world outside the United States, a university ranked in the top 22 across the globe for engineering, among the top 30 for science.

This success is made possible by great academics doing wonderful work. Many are here tonight, representing almost every imaginable field of human knowledge. Brilliant scholars who have unravelled the mystery of mad cow disease and the lessons for treating Alzheimer's. Talented researchers who find new Vivaldi manuscripts in dusty Germany archives, trace patterns of immigration to Australia, excavate ancient cities in Mesopotamia. Great minds that model economies, tackle poverty in Indigenous communities, improve the health of our teeth, create art, map tiny surfaces, build superconductors, glimpse futures.

Our students too, remain remarkable - Australia's best and brightest. Those starting university this year – born, terrifyingly, in 1986 and 1987 - are the best educated cohort we've ever seen. A new generation of students, drawn from across Australia and the world, are making a difference.

Students such as final year law student Sarah Finnin, who has volunteered to help defend David Hicks. Or young immunologist Sook-San Wong, winner of the University's inaugural Prime Minister of Malaysia scholarship, who is working on a vaccine for dengue fever.

Students are working harder than ever. The library is full until late at night. University learning resources are being accessed on line at impossible hours. Fewer students than ever drop out of university, and record numbers secure employment on graduation.

The future of this city, this nation, will be in the best of hands.

But still, the sense of fun that should mark student life surfaces occasionally. Students have just finished Prosh Week, with pranks across campus, included a foiled attempt to kidnap a visiting quality assurance team.

Still, reports of male students undertaking naked wheelbarrow races across the South Lawn late at night are, I'm assured, much exaggerated.

Next week, perhaps, there will be time for study.

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In the next few months the University will launch a revised Melbourne Agenda – our blueprint to strengthen research and teaching, to ensure a lively campus, to connect with industry.

That process of consultation is in full swing. But tonight I can announce three initiatives that build Melbourne's commitment to arts and science.

The University will form a strategic alliance with one of Australia's great medical research centres, the Howard Florey Institute, and the equally impressive Mental Health Research Institute.

Our aim is ambitious: to create with Howard Florey, MHRI and other key partners one of the great world centres for neurosciences. An understanding of the brain, the nervous system, the mind, is the next great medical frontier. We want Melbourne at the forefront.

From science to the arts, the State Government of Victoria and the University of Melbourne have today announced joint funding to investigate a new conservatorium of music for this city. It is time to build on the great musical heritage of Melbourne. The new conservatorium would bring together, as individual identities, the University's Faculty of Music, music programs from the Victorian College of the Arts, the Australian National Academy of Music and a new School of Operatic Performance.

This initiative is timely, given commitments from the State government to support a recital hall for Melbourne and a new opera company for Victoria. The New Melbourne Conservatorium feasibility study, to cost \$100,000, builds on unprecedented collaboration between the University and our colleagues at the Victorian College of Arts.

Finally, I am delighted to announce tonight the appointment of three new Vice-Chancellor's Fellows to advise the University over the next year.

These Fellowships invite outstanding intellects to engage with a rich scholarly environment. Joining Melbourne will be three individuals who together bridge the arts and science.

Dr Alice Garner, scholar, musician, actor and author, will reflect on the undergraduate experience in a major book commissioned by Melbourne University Press.

Dr Barry Jones, former Minister for Science and Chair of the Commission for the Future, will help the University think about innovation and science education.

And Jonathan Mills, composer, festival director, educator, will take ideas to a broader audience, by advising on teaching in the creative arts.

All three are here tonight – in this extraordinary place, among this impressive collection of individuals, this microcosm of Melbourne past, present and future.

To create a University of Melbourne in 1853 was a visionary act. This town made us, sustains us, gives us purpose and meaning.

In turn, we strive to give Melbourne one of the best universities in the world, a place of arts and science in a city of ideas.

For your continuing faith in this University, for your support and your inspiration, I ask my University colleagues to rise and Toast the "Town".