

Welcome and introduction
by the Head of St Mark's College, Professor Don Markwell,
to the 2022 J C Bannon Oration
to be given by Professor Melanie Oppenheimer,
Tuesday 18 October 2022

Angela Bannon, Board Chair Linda Matthews, Professor Melanie Oppenheimer and Mark Guyot, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen –

As Head of St Mark's College, it gives me very great pleasure to welcome you to the 2022 J C Bannon Oration, whether you are here in Downer House or viewing online.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which St Mark's College is situated, the Kurna people, and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs, and relationship with the land, and we acknowledge that these are of continuing importance to the Kurna people living today.

The 2022 Bannon Oration is to be given by Professor Melanie Oppenheimer on the topic "Volunteering for the Ages".

As you probably know, the Bannon Oration is given annually at St Mark's College in memory of Dr John Bannon AO. John Bannon was the second former student of this College, after Don Dunstan, to become Premier of South Australia, and he became the second-longest serving Premier of South Australia, from 1982 to 1992 – second only to Sir Thomas Playford.

John Bannon later became the first alumnus of this College to serve as Master or Head of this College, which he did from 2000 to 2007 – with distinction, and much loved.

It is our intention that each Oration in his memory will be published as a high-quality book or at least booklet, and before I introduce this year's Oration, let me mention that the book of last year's Oration is now available. It is the splendid discussion of *South Australia and the Constitution* by Professor John Williams, whom it is a great pleasure to welcome here this evening, along with Dr Wendy Riemens.

Those here in Downer House may purchase this volume after the Oration, and for viewers at home there is the chance to order it online, by going to the events page of our College website – the bottom of the events page.

In her book "Volunteering: Why we can't live without it", Melanie Oppenheimer quoted the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition of volunteering as "unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group" (page 6).

That word “service” is one that we often use at St Mark’s in describing our values and in describing what so many of our students do, and that has been true since the founding of the College by volunteers and philanthropists in 1925.

Before I introduce Melanie Oppenheimer more fully, let me say a brief word about the notion of “service”, of which volunteering is a form, in the life of this College and in the life of John Bannon.

In the early 1920s, when the founders of the College were making the case for the creation of a university college in Adelaide, they argued that it would provide – and I quote – “Training for the students in ideals of ‘Service’”.

The founding Master of this College, Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, spoke powerfully of what he called the application of the “trained academic mind” to the service of others.

He identified, in his phrase, the “foremost founder of St Mark’s” in the 1920s as the Revd Julian Bickersteth who at the time was Headmaster of St Peter’s College. On Sunday we marked the 60th anniversary of Julian Bickersteth’s death on 16 October 1962 in Canterbury in England, where he was a Canon of Canterbury Cathedral.

In that month, October 1962, when John Bannon was a student at St Mark’s, it is almost certain that he would have been present at the College’s final service when Sir Archibald Grenfell Price paid tribute to Canon Bickersteth, saying that Canon Bickersteth had lived to see the result of his labours in this College including – quote – “above all the rapid growth of its great traditions of duty and service which were based upon the ideals of its founders”.

John Bannon exemplified that tradition and that ideal of service.

When, as a schoolboy at St Peter’s College, John Bannon applied in 1961 to become a resident student at St Mark’s, his schoolmaster referee commended him as being – quote – “unflagging in his service to the school”, despite his independence of mind.

Not only was John Bannon “unflagging in his service to [his] school”, but for decades to come he was unflagging in his service to other institutions, notably including this College, and in his service to the wider community, including through his political activism and political service, and in so many other ways as well. He was a recidivist volunteer.

As Master of this College for eight years, John Bannon lauded and promoted the community service activities of the students. I would like to think that he would be proud of the community service activities of our students today, including volunteering through the students’ Charitable Foundation, and that he would be proud of the community service of so many alumni of this College, including four currently serving in State Parliament, including in the present and previous ministries.

Now obviously not all service is volunteering, but surely it is the case that all volunteering is a form of service.

We are fortunate and it is very fitting that this year's Oration in memory of John Bannon is given by a pioneer in the study of volunteering in Australia.

Like John Bannon, Professor Melanie Oppenheimer is an historian. Now based at the Australian National University, she was previously Professor of History at Flinders University and has held positions in Australian history at the University of Western Sydney, the University of New England, and the University of Tokyo. A Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, she has recently completed a two-year term as President of the Australian Historical Association.

For over twenty-five years, Melanie has been interested in exploring the role of voluntary organisations, volunteers and voluntary action in times of war and peace, and the history of volunteering, gender and humanitarianism, with a special interest in the Australian Red Cross and the Red Cross Movement.

We are all products of our environment, and as readers of some of her works will know, Melanie's interest in volunteering was inspired by the example of volunteering in her own family – from her great grandmother's role in founding the Country Women's Association in New South Wales 100 years ago this year, her grandmother's involvement with the Red Cross, and her mother's involvement with the National Parks Association, the National Trust, and more. It is a pleasure to welcome members of Melanie and Mark's family here today.

Melanie's research and writing on the Red Cross led her to develop a keen interest in the foundational President of the Australian Red Cross in World War I, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, the Irish-Scottish aristocratic wife of Australia's sixth Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson. Melanie's major current project is a joint biography of this "Imperial power couple".

In her presentation at the end of a recent fellowship at the National Library of Australia, Melanie quoted the epitaph on Lady Helen Munro Ferguson's grave in Scotland: "In the service of others her life was spent".

Those words could also be the epitaph for John Bannon.

It is my privilege to call on Professor Melanie Oppenheimer to deliver the J C Bannon Oration.