

Toast to Professor Peter Edwards AM
Fellows' Dinner, St Mark's College
Saturday 17 June 2023

It is such a pleasure to join the Chair of the Board in welcoming Professor Peter Edwards AM and Dr Jacky Abbott to the College tonight, and what a pleasure it is to propose the toast to my good friend Peter on his richly-merited appointment as an Honorary Fellow of the College.

To say that Peter Edwards is a distinguished historian and biographer in the field of Australian military history, foreign policy, intelligence, and other public affairs is to state the obvious.

And to say that he was a consequential Master of this College is also to state the obvious. No one who, as Peter did, took part in last year's celebration of the 40th anniversary of the commencement of coeducation here, which change he encouraged and oversaw, could think otherwise.

Peter, of course, served as the fourth Master of St Mark's College from 1978 to 1982. In his speech to students at the Final Dinner at the end of 1982, as he was about to leave, Peter thanked them all – and I quote – “for giving me five years that have been delightful and exasperating, hilarious and agonising, rewarding and frustrating – in fact, almost every adjective you can think of except dull”.

As I have already alluded to, the historic development of these “delightful and exasperating” five years was the decision in 1981 to admit women to the College, and the successful implementation of coeducation in 1982, his final year in post.

It is so good that a number of the members of the College Council of 1981 who made that crucial decision – Rod Matheson, Rob Cheesman, Richard Scott Young, and Tony Shinkfield – are here tonight, and I know it is disappointing to us all that another, John Doyle, is unable to be here tonight for family reasons.

And how wonderful that one of the first St Mark's women students of 1982, Angela Evans, is also being welcomed as an Honorary Fellow tonight.

But coeducation is far from the only achievement of Peter's years as Master. Those years saw a half-empty college turned into one with more applicants than places; the formation of a Property Committee (on which he served, along I suspect with some others here tonight), developments on the western end of the College site on Kermode Street, restoration of what from 1982 was called Walkley Cottage; and what were said at the time to be improvements in – I quote - the College's "internal atmosphere, its reputation in the University [of Adelaide] and the general community, the quality of the senior and junior residents, and the values expressed in its daily life".

Over the decades since, Peter has continued to take a supportive and generous interest in the College, its projects, its reunions, and its successive heads. Having known Peter for many years, and having known of him for many more, I have myself greatly valued his warm and encouraging interest during my time here, including – to mention it again – his coming over from Melbourne last year for the 40th anniversary celebrations.

When Peter Edwards came to St Mark's in 1978 at the age of 32 to become Master, he was already a highly regarded historian in Australia and

internationally, including in Oxford, where he had been a Rhodes Scholar for Western Australia.

At the end of 1982, having achieved so much in often challenging times, Peter answered the irresistible call to become Official Historian of Australia's involvement in the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War – a position in Australian historical scholarship of considerable public as well as academic significance.

Over subsequent years, as you probably know, Peter has continued to work in various roles as a historian and biographer, with one foot in universities (including various fellowships and professorships in Australia and the United States), and one foot in government agencies related to foreign affairs, defence, and intelligence.

His association with St Mark's lends lustre to us, and his leadership of the College as Master has left an indelible and invaluable impression.

It is profoundly fitting that Peter should be recognised as an Honorary Fellow, and I ask you please to stand and join me in a toast to Professor Peter Edwards AM, Fourth Master and Honorary Fellow of St Mark's College.

- To Peter Edwards