



THE SCOTS COLLEGE 2004 SPEECH DAY

**The Hon. Justice Garry Downes AM
President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal**

**Address at The Scots College 2004 Speech Day
and Presentation of Senior School Prizes**

6 December 2004

Mr Chairman, Moderator, Dr Iles, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and especially students of Scots.

Thank you Mr Chairman for your kind introduction and for your remarks about my family in the programme. It is a great pleasure and privilege to have been invited here today.

First let me thank all those associated with the musical presentations we have heard this morning. They were truly excellent – easily meeting the standards of this great concert hall.

Speech days are about looking forward. And looking back. Some of you will be looking back as school days come to an end. And looking forward to adult life. But for all of you there will be change as you move on to another level in your education.

In Australia, unlike the Northern hemisphere, the end of the year coincides with the end of the academic year. This is accordingly a time for reflection and renewal for all of us.

I want to talk to you today about two people, father and son.

Andrew White was a shoemaker. He enlisted as a mounted trooper in the Scots Greys. He was sixteen when he joined up and he served for eight years. He was part of the famous and courageous charge of the Scots Greys at Waterloo. He was grievously wounded in the charge and was subsequently pensioned out of the army. Not a great beginning, even if a celebrated one. By this time he had a wife and a son. He had a small war pension, but nothing more. The prospects for a disabled cobbler in the first half of the nineteenth century were not good. In 1832 he came to Australia as part of a military commutation programme by which pensioned soldiers gave up their pension for a passage to Australia and a grant of land. Just think of it. He gave up his pension for land he had never seen - in a country he had never been to. In Neilston, near Glasgow, where he lived, there was not a lot of information about Australia.

The land was close to what is now Singleton. But the Hunter Valley was not even settled at the time. The Great North Road from Five Dock across Wiseman's Ferry and up through Wollombi was still being built with convict labour. Horseback, not carriages, was the most effective means of travel. This was real pioneering spirit. They must have lived in tents at the outset. There must have been problems in finding food. For the White family this was serious aspiration.

Fate shined on Andrew White. The land he was granted was good land. It had a long frontage to the Hunter River which ran around three sides. Singleton was settled on the opposite bank. The property was developed. It was called *Gowrie*. It still bears that name, although part of it is now part of Singleton.

Another part is the local golf course. Andrew White ultimately built a substantial homestead high on a hill looking across the Hunter River to Singleton. By the time he died Andrew White was the laird of Singleton.

Not bad for a shoemaker badly injured in war. It must have been the result of a great deal of planning and resolve, of hard work in pursuit of goals and aspirations. You do not voyage half way round the world, to settle and then succeed in a pioneering environment, by accident. Andrew White's achievement was not so much an achievement of the intellect as it was a great achievement from determination and resolve as well as obvious manual skills and probably management skills as well.

James White was a young boy when he arrived in Australia. He made the journey to Singleton with his mother and father. But he was educated in Sydney at John Dunmore Lang's *Australian College*. In contrast to his father he obviously had an academic bent. That was where his talents lay. That was where he set his goals. He taught at the Australian College. He studied at the fledgling University of Sydney from which he ultimately was awarded a Doctor of Laws degree. He became a minister of the Church of Scotland in Australia. He was the first Presbyterian minister wholly educated in Australia. After he was ordained he returned to Singleton and served as Minister to the people of Singleton for fifty five years almost coinciding with the reign of Queen Victoria.

Andrew had been the farmer and worker. James was the scholar and intellectual. He preached. He wrote. He founded the Maitland School of Arts. He was headmaster of the Singleton Grammar School. He wrote prodigiously on religious and social topics. He advocated the cause of aborigines when few others did. He was twice Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. And he founded this great College, Scots.

I would not wish you to think James White was wholly bookish. This was the second half of the nineteenth century in the Hunter Valley. He serviced Muswellbrook and other places as well as Singleton. And the way to get around was still on horseback. On Sunday he would often preach in Singleton in the morning and then ride to Muswellbrook in the afternoon in time to preach in the evening, returning to Singleton early the following morning. There were no bridges, just creek crossings and nothing you could call a road. This was no mean feat. I know. I have tried it with one of my daughters, on grey horses, of course, and it took us a day and a half just to ride from Singleton to Muswellbrook.

But undoubtedly James White, unlike his farmer father, chose to concentrate on intellectual pursuits and the Church as the focus of his life. His father had succeeded against great odds in a life involving physical work and endeavour. With planning and preparation, James succeeded in a life involving intelligence and learning but which also required physical skills and courage.

The lesson of my ancestors is that what we look for in life is for each of us to decide. Whether we succeed is in our own hands. The goals which suit each of us are different. Some may involve intellect, some may involve physical skills, others may involve practical skills or skills which depend on understanding human nature. But for all of us there is a personal goal. It is wrong to think that your goal should be the same as the goal of someone else or a popular goal. We should look for the goal that is best for each of us.

You have had the advantage of a privileged education. The choices available to you are probably better than to others. Many of you will already have made important decisions about your future. But for all of you – for all of us – there are always opportunities and choices. My message to you today is not to waste your opportunities. To make sure you choose wisely.

We must take our opportunities and choices seriously, thinking on the one hand of our own interests, but also thinking of how we may be able to contribute to society. We should think about financial rewards, but we should recognise that money is not happiness. We should think of other kinds of rewards. We should think carefully about our careers, but we should also think about how careers fit in with family, children and quality of life.

Developing goals and aspirations can be exciting – almost a reward in itself. The person to pity is the person who does not plan; the person who does not seek to take full advantage of his talents; the person who lets life wash over him rather than thinking about the possibilities, developing goals and planning to achieve them. How many people are there who could have made a fulfilling and rewarding life but never thought about the future, never saw the possibilities, never made the plan?

Setting goals, having aspirations and working towards achieving them has been central to my life. Such modest success as I have had I think is largely attributable to planning and goal setting. I have had some good fortune. I count the period during which I was the associate to the Chief Justice of Australia, Sir Garfield Barwick, as one of the most important periods of my life. He was a great man. Working for Sir Garfield had a profound influence on me. The time I lived in Paris as President of the Union Internationale des Avocats was also a fortunate one for me. However, neither event would have occurred without planning and effort. Fortune smiles on those who lay the groundwork and build on it.

My great great grandfather, my great grandfather and I have been very different. But our lives reinforce a message. First, set your goal. It may be adventurous, but should be realistic. Having set the goal, go for it. Do not draw back or hesitate just because you might not succeed.

I congratulate all of you who are about to receive prizes. Many of you have already made a great success. You must be putting into practice the ideas I have been explaining.

I wish all boys of Scots the very best for the future. I wish everyone here the best for the festive season. I wish those of you who are about to begin holidays a pleasant and happy break.

I am not an old boy of Scots. For reasons I never quite understood my parents sent me to Newington. However, I well remember speech days when I was at Newington – always in the Town Hall. Summer was upon us, Long Reef Beach was beckoning, the speeches were often excruciatingly boring. But by the afternoon school was over for the year – for some it was over forever. Many of you must now be enduring this speech by thinking about what you will be doing tomorrow. I may have done the same thing. I join all of you in celebrating the end of the school year.

Thank you.