



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Australian Capital Territory Branch

E-NEWS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH

E-Newsletter March-April 2023

Branch Patron: H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia



COMMONWEALTH LECTURE SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON GOVERNMENT INTEGRITY

Three major subjects and their links were addressed by Professor Anne Twomey in delivering the Commonwealth Low Lecture in March—the Coronation, the Commonwealth, and government integrity—and it was the integrity of government—or lack of it—that came under her closest scrutiny.



Professor Anne Twomey (third from left) with members of the Low family, Ms Georgina Neuhaus (left) Hon. Professor Matthew Neuhaus, Professor Low's two daughters, Mrs Angela Neuhaus and Ms Penny Low, with her son, Mr Anthony Harrison. The annual Lecture, named for the late Emeritus Professor Anthony Low, Commonwealth historian and former Vice-Chancellor of the ANU, is a highlight in the RCS calendar, sponsored by the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia of which Professor Low was founding Conventor. The lecture is supported by the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific.

Professor Emerita Twomey, a Constitutional Law specialist and President of the Constitutional Law Reform Unit at the University of Sydney, began her lecture with a summary of how the relationship of the modern monarchy with the Commonwealth's dominions and realms was established.

This was followed by the significance of the symbols that King Charles will hold at his forthcoming coronation: the Sword of Mercy (with its blunt end) the Sword of Temporal Justice, the Sceptre with the Cross, which symbolises regal power and justice, and the Sceptre and the Dove, representing equity and mercy. Fundamental is the notion that executive power must be exercised with justice, mercy, equity, and in accordance with the rule of law.

In times when governments often act with 'stark disregard' to these fundamental principles, Professor Twomey cited robodebt, and the royal commission's finding of a 'litany of failure' by the Federal Government of the time to observe any of them.

As part of the explanation, she referred to the 'massive shift in power' over recent decades to Ministers and their 'advisers' and the 'growing irrelevance' of public servants.

Unwarranted power

The public service, she said, had been 'hollowed out,' with senior officials put on contracts and dismissed at the whim of Ministers unhappy about receiving advice that is contrary to their wishes, while ministerial advisers are 'partisan actors', neither responsible to Parliament nor accountable as public servants, wielding disproportionate and unwarranted power.

'These are the people,' she said, 'who tell public servants not to provide controversial advice in writing, only orally, so that it can later be denied.'

This was happening not only in Australia, she said, but also in the United Kingdom and other parts of the Commonwealth. In Australia, however, the ‘apogee of dysfunctional government’ was in 2019, when the Prime Minister Scott Morrison told public servants that their role was ‘simply to deliver the outcomes decided upon by Ministers’. But what happens, she asked, when the policy is unlawful, unconstitutional, ineffective, uneconomical, a misuse of public money, or unethical? To what extent then, is the public servant complicit in unlawful or inexcusable behaviour? She said we can only hope that the ‘horrors’ exposed by the robodebt royal commission, together with other actions such as the establishment of the national Anti-Corruption Commission, may provide

the catalyst for major cultural reform both in the public service and in ministerial offices.

When it comes to the Commonwealth, she said, we are ‘well past the point where some countries can preach to others about integrity issues’. Although the Commonwealth Secretariat has two important programs—one aimed at strengthening the rule of law and the other with strengthening public sector governance—its focus is on small and less-developed countries.

‘It might be about time that we had the humility to admit that such action is needed in the large and developed countries of the Commonwealth too,’ she said. *Professor Twomey’s lecture will be published in a future issue of The Round Table Journal.*

HIGH COMMISSIONERS’ LUNCH AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE



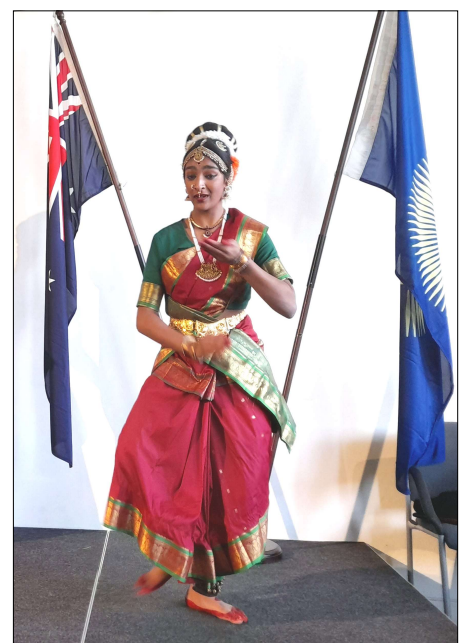
The Governor-General and Mrs Hurley hosted a lunch at Government House for High Commissioners and senior members of the RCS ACT Branch during Commonwealth Week in March.

COMMONWEALTH DAY CELEBRATED WITH SONG, DANCE AND DIDGERIDOO

Colourful cultural performances by singers, dancers and musicians from the Canberra community and readings from sacred texts by faith leaders marked our 2023 Commonwealth Day Celebration at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

A welcome from Professor Anthony Maher, Executive Director of the ACCC was followed by a performance on the didgeridoo by Bevan Smith. Then everyone joined in singing the *Australian Hymn*, with words by Canberra poets Michael and Honor Thwaites.

The Canberra celebration follows closely the Commonwealth Day celebration in London at Westminster Abbey, attended this year by King Charles III, Head of the Commonwealth, whose Message was read by Hon. Professor Matthew Neuhaus, RCS ACT Branch President. A reflection on the Commonwealth Day Message was recorded on screen by our Patron, the Governor-General HE General David Hurley, and played at the Celebration. A message from the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, was read by David Smith MP. Sacred Texts on the 2023 Commonwealth theme of *A Common Future* were read by leaders from the Catholic, Baha’i, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Anglican, Jain, Buddhist and Islamic faiths.



A dancer from the Punjabi Kaur Sisters

COMMONWEALTH DINNER IN MARCH

RCS members and friends gathered at the Commonwealth Club in Yarralumla in March for our annual Commonwealth Dinner.

Guest speaker was Hon. Professor Matthew Neuhaus, who spoke about *The Commonwealth in the post Elizabethan Age*.

Professor Neuhaus was recently elected President of the RCS ACT Branch (see report below). He returned to Australia in late 2022 after serving as Australia's Ambassador to The Hague.



Among guests at the dinner were Dr Hugh Craft (above left), Ms Caroline Ross-Smith, Mr Jon Richardson, Mrs Lynne Craft and Mrs Sharon Blight. Others (below) were Dr John Sutton (left), Mrs Ann Sutton and Dr Dennis Blight.



RCS Treasurer, Dr Sunita Dhindsa (left) Mr Colin Milner and Dr Harjinder Dhindsa at the Commonwealth Dinner.

COMMONWEALTH PEACE FLAG

The Commonwealth Flag of Peace (below) was launched in London in March by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland. The flag was designed with the white Dove of Peace in its corner 'as a fitting emblem to each other and to the world' to promote 2023 as the Commonwealth Year of Peace across its 56 members nations. 2023 is also the Commonwealth Year of Youth. Currently, there are 1.5 billion Commonwealth citizens under the age of 30.



RCS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General meeting of the RCS ACT Branch was held on 23 February. The following Office Bearers were elected to serve one year:

President: Hon. Professor Matthew Neuhaus

Vice-President: Mrs Maureen Hickman

Treasurer: Dr Sunita Dhindsa

The following were elected to serve on Council for a three year term:

Professor David Plummer

Mrs Sue Gage

All were elected unopposed.

Other Council members, at various stages of their three-year terms are: Dr Martin Hess, Mr Bradley Innes, Dr Elmo Jacob, Mr Jack Milne and Mrs Ann Sutton.

CORONATION INVITATION FEATURES KING'S INTERESTS IN NATURE

The invitation to the Coronation in Westminster Abbey on 6 May reflects the King's interests in nature and the environment in a hand-painted design, featuring a border of British wildflowers and wildlife, by British heraldic artist Andrew Jamieson. It appears to be the first official reference to the Queen Consort as 'Queen Camilla'.

The design features the Coats of Arms of both King and Queen—the latter's granted in 2005 to mark her 54th birthday—is on the top right hand corner. The invitation was revealed to the media by Buckingham Palace during Easter Week. At the foot of the invitation is The Green Man, crowned in natural foliage of oak, ivy and hawthorn, and the floral emblems of the



United Kingdom. The Green Man, often considered a Pagan symbol, is found in many forms throughout history. Carvings of him, however, are to be found in many churches throughout Britain, including Westminster Abbey, and is considered to be a bridge between Christian and Pagan beliefs.

In his Coronation oath, King Charles will swear to govern the peoples of each of the current 15 Commonwealth Realms, including Australia, according to their laws and customs.

The invitation will be sent to 2000 people. Our patron the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley will be attending.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

AIIA/RCS PUBLIC LECTURE

The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland KC
Commonwealth Secretary-General

'The Commonwealth in a Changing World'
Monday 24 April
5.30 for 6pm

AIIA Conference Centre, Stephen House
Thesiger Court, Deakin

To register: aiaact.glueup.com/event/the-commonwealth-in-a-changing-world

CORONATION EVE COCKTAILS

Friday 5 May
5.30-7pm
\$25

at the home of Ann and John Sutton
49/9 Eastlake Parade, Kingston
Acceptances: a.jsutton@netspeed.com.au
by **Tuesday 2 May**

Payment by EFT to:
BSB 032778 a/c no.149355
with surname, cocktails, in the subject line

VALETE

The RCS ACT Branch is saddened by the death in March 2023 of two of its members, Mrs Helen Campbell and the Rev'd Dr Robert Withycombe. Our sincere condolences go to their families.

E-NEWS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH is an official publication of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Australian Capital Territory Branch, for Members and Friends of the Commonwealth. It is published regularly throughout the year and replaces the quarterly printed newsletter *Commonwealth News*.

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Membership inquiries are welcome.