

PROFESSOR ARTHUR BROWN - Who brought Crabtree to Australia

Arthur Brown was appointed to Monash University in June 1973. In earlier years he was Professor of English (1962 – 1969), Professor of Library Studies and Director of the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies (1969-1973), at University College London. His career introduced him to a network of distinguished writers, critics and publishers, among whom was the celebrated JRR Tolkien. In fact, Arthur brought with him an illustrated manuscript by Tolkien, an item he occasionally produced to the delight of many Middle Earth and Hobbit enthusiasts.

His friends say that he fell in love with Australia when, on an earlier visit he stepped off the plane in Sydney on a day where, in direct contrast to the climate he had just left in London, it was sunny and warm. So much so, it is said, that he went straight to the nearest clothing shop and invested in shorts and socks, abandoning his UK clothing in the shop's changing room. Whether this is fact is debatable, but it should be noted that during his Monash appointment he was often seen wearing such apparel. The addition of his well-filled snuff box and its constant use soon set him aside as no ordinary academic.

Soon after taking up the position of Professor in the Department of English Arthur began to influence campus life and activities. His great interest in printing saw him involved with the management of the library where he arranged for the display of a vintage printing press in the foyer, he became the chairman of the Monash University Club Management Committee and made friends with the entire security staff in much the same way as he had endeared himself to the Porters at UCL.

This latter group became very protective of "Brownie" as he became known, watching over him when he worked late into the night and on occasions seeing him safely back to bed in his nearby accommodation.

His role of Chairman of the club was celebrated by all, particularly at annual meetings. In earlier years these were marathon two-hour gatherings with countless complaints and queries arising from the floor. Under Arthur all matters were dealt with so quickly that within thirty minutes from the start everyone would be back at the bar.

Not long after his appointment he shared the chairmanship of the English Department with Professor David Bradley, holding the position between 1974 and 1976, and from 1979 until his death. He was appointed to the academic committee that ran University's The Alexander Theatre in 1976, becoming its chair in 1977.

An early riser he would appear at his office soon after sunrise, complete his administrative tasks and be at the club bar by 11.00 am where he delighted in raising the curtain for first drinks. Other than when teaching or involved with Professorial Board matters, he spent much of his day there.

He rapidly established his Australian network through lunchtime gatherings at the Club and more informal meals with organizations such as The Beefsteak and Burgundy Club which he attended quite regularly. Through these he gathered, as friends, many Australian authors, publishers, and educators. Among them, Don Charlwood, Nick Hudson, Rick Belshaw and Gordon Taylor. To these he

added such University luminaries as Keith Bennetts, Graeme Erbacher, Pat Kilbride, and Vice Chancellor Ray Martin.

As indicated above Professor Brown had accumulated many distinguished friends and colleagues in his years at UCL. Most of these shared his appreciation of the absurd, sense of humour and affection for the products of the vine. With such a collection of like great minds it is no wonder that the thirst for Crabtree knowledge was rediscovered. From this arose "The Joseph Crabtree Foundation" which remains within the UCL ever since.

It is interesting to note that Arthur must have been one of the foundation members of this highly significant group for it is recorded that he delivered the second-ever oration (1955) entitled *Towards a Crabtree Bibliography*.

Needless to say, his Australian cohort was largely composed of characters similar to those of his UK literary friends and it was not long before they too, with a little leadership from Arthur, developed a passion for discovering more of the career and incredible achievements of Joseph Crabtree.

On the occasion of a visit to Monash by Professor Brian Bennett, one of those present at the first UCL oration in 1954, the Australian Chapter of The Joseph Crabtree Foundation came into being in 1975.

It should be obvious that the establishment of the Australian Chapter was Professor Brown's greatest achievement at Monash. It would possibly have been eclipsed had he delivered yet another oration, but records show that he made no such contribution to the Australian search for Crabtree truth.

The writer's main contact with Professor Brown was through the Alexander Theatre. Arthur took a particular interest in this aspect of University life, often describing the Alex as his personal theatre. He endeared himself to the staff who would go out of their way to ensure his presence at theatrical parties and similar celebrations. He insisted that the theatre install a foyer bar, subsequently named after him, and fought for the theatre's support by the professorial board of the University.

On many occasions, usually after interval and after the Club closed, Arthur would appear at the manager's office clutching a bottle of Jameson's whiskey and two tumblers. Sometimes on these visits he would discuss the agenda for coming meetings of the Alexander Theatre Committee and how the matters to be discussed would be dealt with in such a manner that the meeting would be over within half an hour.

On other visits he would ply the hapless manager with many nips (read tumblers) of Jameson's. In self-defence the manager installed a pot plant beside his desk which sometimes suffered alcoholic poisoning.

Sadly, Professor Brown died in 1979. His funeral saw a standing room only attendance at the Monash University Religious Centre. In his eulogy Vice Chancellor Ray Martin made reference to Arthur's great contribution to Campus life by his introduction of Crabtree research.

The resulting hoot of laughter from those present would have made him proud.

For years Arthur's photograph was displayed beside the Likeness of Crabtree at annual dinners. Unfortunately, this photo disappeared when Elder Pat Kilbride died, and a suitable replacement is yet to be found.

Elder Phil A'Vard