

The premiers

By David Ash

Bar News has previously celebrated institutions with a series of clerihews. In recognition of the High Court's centenary year, the winter 2003 issue carried clerihews of appointments through to its 50th year, 1953. The summer 2005/2006 issue carried clerihews of New South Welsh chief justices from Sir Frances Forbes to the incumbent, Jim Spigelman AC.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a clerihew as 'A short comic or nonsensical verse, professedly biographical, of two couplets differing in length.' *Wikipedia* gives as an example the harsh assessment 'George the Third / Ought never to have occurred. / One can only wonder / At so grotesque a blunder.'

This year of 2006 is the sesquicentenary of responsible government in New South Wales. In recognition, *Bar News* traces *the premiers*, first of the state and then of the colony.

Morris lemma
Current premier
His job is to give a 12-year-old government starch
To survive the battle set for next March.

Robert John Carr
A surprise star
There remains debate about his legacy
Yet his reign saw in Sydney as an international city.

John Joseph Fahey
Enjoyed a personal popularity
An early Liberal to support a republican fix
He jumped upon Sydney winning the Olympics.

Nicholas Frank Greiner
An ideological redesigner
He solidly sold his solid reforms
But found himself battered by political storms.

Barrie John Unsworth
Returned to basics, back to earth
He faced the electorate braced for a fall
And took responsibility for it all.

Neville Kenneth Wran
Labor's archetype for Modern Man
A decade when everything seemed to occur
Not least the flying of considerable fur.

Eric Archibald Willis
Was shocked when he was pipped by Lewis
A parliamentarian close to the grass roots organisation
But his snap election was, in hindsight, a miscalculation.

Thomas Lancelot Lewis
A year in office
He achieved things with the public service
But he made some of his own party nervous.

Robin (but Sir Robert) William Askin
Knew public opinion
Yet that very beast links him with organised crimes
Due to a profile, a fortnight after he died, in the National Times.

John Brophy Renshaw
Elected in '41, knew the score
But his party had ruled for 24 years
And the electorate decided to change its gears.

Robert James Heffron
Examples the notion of progression
Although, like others he did get a little waylaid
In the vexing issue of state aid.

John Joseph ('Old Smoothie') Cahill
Did not by Labor's split get ensnarled.
And the Opera House that he got underway
Can be seen from his expressway.

James McGirr
Houses over public works did prefer
Though Labor was ill with Cold War infections
He led them through two elections.

William John McKell
Ran it all very well
Later a controversial name for governor-general
Yet revealed himself as a natural.

Alexander Mair
Lacked flair
He tried hard with a tired administration
But faced a reinvigorated opposition.

Bertram Sydney Barnsdale Stevens
Pushed his barrow over Bavin's
Yet he too was caught by the Depression
Losing the leadership in a prewar session.

Thomas Rainsford Bavin
Learnt to take it on the chin
He was a Liberal in the Deakinish way
Tough work, in times when moderation seemed passé.

John Thomas Lang
Offered a little Sturm und Drang
For some a god, for others an unholy thistle
Whichever, he suffered dismissal.

George Warburton Fuller
Could have sought a life much duller
Neither premiership was a bed of flowers
The first lasting for only seven hours.

James Dooley

Dealt with Labor getting unruly
Exhausted, years later he could not resist
Declaring himself 'a political atheist'.

John Storey

Another who boilermade in lieu of being Tory
He was challenged by the party's executive factions
For supporting the Cabinet's and caucus's actions.

William Arthur Holman

As a Labor stalwart began
He fell foul on the issue of conscription
To end up of the Nationalist description.

James Sinclair Taylor McGowen

One of Labor's working men
From boilermaking in an earlier year
He became the party's first premier.

Charles Gregory Wade

An all-rounder by ill-health betrayed
Moving eventually to the Supreme Court
A term less than three years short.

Joseph Hector Carruthers

Can be seen as one of Menzies' mothers
He founded the Liberal and Reform Association
A Liberal Party in anticipation.

Thomas Waddell

Did not raise hell
An efficient but rather limited Tory
He put integrity well above glory.

John See

Let things be
His party was called Progressive
But his will was unaggressive.

William John Lyne

Saw the sign
The first prime ministership was offered to NSW's premier
But, unable to find a cabinet, he had to undecare.

George Houstoun Reid

Large in girth, large in deed
Early, he called on Labor support, later an anti-socialist beacon
Although in this role he was eclipsed by Deakin.

Patrick Alfred Jennings

Had less than a one-year innings
But his place in the pantheon is automatic
As premier, being the first practising Catholic.

George Richard Dibbs

Was hardly 'his nibs'
Though for business, he enacted the forerunner of conciliation
And viewed sectarianism with condemnation.

Alexander Stuart

Though a Scot, increased the colony's debt
A large public program, with land for stock
He also secured Garden Island for the navy, as a dock.

James Squire Farnell

Grandson of the brewer, yet not himself remembered well
His obituary in *The Australasian* did not even declare
That he had once been, briefly, premier.

Henry Parkes

Left huge marks
Congratulated upon his seventeenth son as his last
He replied 'Don't say "my last", you fool, say "my latest"'.
'

James Martin

His tastes, epicurean
His critics held that he had been raised from the sludge
He repaid their concern by ending up as chief judge.

John Robertson

Took the squatters on
Known as Free Selection Jack
In retirement, he took an anti-federation tack.

William Forster

With three volumes to his credit maybe poetry did prefer
As a politician, it was politics he lacked
Or, as the Herald said, he had 'more virtue than tact'.

Henry Watson Parker

Married the daughter of John Macarthur
Liberals he opposed with confused aplomb
Later, at Home, he ran against Gladstone, GOM.

Charles ('Slippery Charlie') Cowper

Adroit in his quest for power
First of three to be a five-time office holder
He ended as agent-general in a clime somewhat colder.

Stuart Alexander Donaldson

Dueled with Sir Thomas Mitchell
First premier by compromise begotten
A term of two months 19 days forgotten.