

Ceremony To Mark Restoration Of Roma Courthouse
Wednesday 23 June 1999
The Hon P de Jersey - Chief Justice

Mr Chairman
Mr Attorney
Your Honours
Mr Brian Littleproud MLA, Member for Western Downs
Deputy Mayor of Roma, Cr Jill Baker
Mayor of Bungil Shire, Cr Neville Freeman
Stipendiary Magistrate Mr Ian Rose
Director General Ms Jane Macdonnell

Ladies and Gentlemen

Although I have previously sat in this fine courthouse, I have not previously visited Roma in my capacity as Chief Justice. I am very pleased to return now to acknowledge this magnificent restoration, and to be doing so early in my term.

It is the tradition, on the opening of a courthouse constructed by the Executive arm of Government, that the keys are handed over and entrusted to the judiciary, symbolizing its independence from other arms of Government. We have not, in this case, ever surrendered possession of those symbolic keys, it being a case of restoration; but we are nevertheless most grateful to accept this heritage listed building so newly and superbly restored - and we will continue to operate with independence from within it!

Perceptions matter a lot these days, and in many areas of life. They always have in the law: recall our concern that justice must also be seen to be done. There is no doubt that members of the public now entering this courthouse will immediately perceive an elegance, dignity and purity in the physical presentation, and that perception will aptly prepare them for the proceedings within.

I congratulate the Executive on its progressive initiative in this venture. It is good to see substantial sums of money so well spent, and particularly here in Roma. We now see a memorable and important courthouse recovering a grandeur appropriate not only to the institution, but also appropriate to this very fine and important part of the State.

I note with pleasure the presence of my colleague, the Honourable Mr Justice Helman, who has himself contributed valuably to the project. Indeed, it was His Honour's expression of concern at the state of the courthouse, while sitting here on circuit in April 1997, which gave this whole project its initial impetus. In a

memorandum to the Senior Judge Administrator, Mr Justice Helman then said these things:

"On my recent circuit to Roma I noticed that there are large cracks in an internal wall on the eastern side of the Roma courthouse... there are similar cracks on the western side of the building in the jury room ... urgent attention may be required to ensure that no further damage takes place and that the damage that has already occurred is repaired.

There is another feature of the courthouse I suggest should be considered for the long term. The courthouse is a splendid old building constructed in 1904. Alterations to the building carried out possibly in the 1960s or 1970s have, however, destroyed its character. Among other things done to the building were: removal of the original furniture and replacement by inferior fittings, lowering of ceilings, concealing of a fireplace in the courtroom and reducing the size of the courtroom. It would be most desirable to restore the building to its original splendour but with, of course, modern plumbing and air conditioning. I do not mean that if that were to happen the courthouse should be used as a museum or for any purpose other than as a court building. It should continue to be used as a court building because its design for that purpose could not be improved."

And so the project began. Thank you, Mr Justice Helman.

I also wish to mention with thanks the valuable work on the project of Mr Bob Pollock, Executive Manager, Property Services in the Department of Justice and Attorney General, and in his few months here as Registrar, Mr Dennis Beutel.

I repeat in conclusion my expression of great pleasure in returning as Chief Justice on this particular occasion. I look forward to coming again, both to sit and conduct proceedings in the courthouse, and, as Chief Justice, to meet with the people of the region.

Thank you.