

PROFESSOR ALAN DAVID GILBERT

Born in Brisbane on 11 September 1944, Alan Gilbert completed his secondary education at Canberra High School. He became an undergraduate at the Australian National University, where in 1965 he completed his BA with first class honours, taking the ANU University Prize. After completing his MA in history, he took up a position as lecturer at the University of Papua & New Guinea in 1967. A Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Award and Nuffield College Studentship took him to Oxford, and he was awarded his DPhil in 1973.

On his return to Australia he accepted a position as lecturer at the University of New South Wales, commencing an academic association which extended until 1990. Over that period, through his work as a teacher, researcher, author and editor, he established an international reputation as an historian within his areas of interest in the social, socio-economic and religious history of modern Britain and Australia. His University appointed him Professor of History in the Faculty of Military Studies in 1981, which merged into the University College, Australian Defence Force Academy in 1986.

He published widely in British and Australian history, including *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (1976), *Churches and Churchgoers* (1978) and *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (1980). He was a joint General Editor of *Australians: A Historical Library*, an eleven-volume history of Australia written to mark the Bicentenary in 1988. His international standing was further recognised by his election as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in 1990.

An aptitude for management and leadership led to his appointment as Chair of the Faculty of Military Studies in 1982, and his final years at the University New South Wales were spent as Pro-Vice Chancellor (1988-90). He was appointed Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Tasmania in 1991 at the time of the merger of the University with the Launceston CAE, two institutions with distinct histories, missions and regional ties. His management, planning and leadership skills were fundamental to the success of this amalgamation.

He led the University to an enhanced role in the Tasmanian community as it sought to plan its future development - in particular his role in chairing the *Tasmania 2010* forum, a University-initiated venture which succeeded in bringing together key decision-makers regardless of their place in the political spectrum. He was awarded an honorary D.Litt. by the University of Tasmania in 1995.

Professor Gilbert became Vice-Chancellor of The University of Melbourne on 1 January 1996, at a time of declining Commonwealth funding of higher education. His challenge to the University was to respond through a distinctive 'Melbourne Agenda': this sought to meet the public funding gap by creating new income streams with a long-term view of making the University one of the finest in the world.

Under his leadership the University embarked on its most ambitious building program, expanding the University to the south with the dramatic development of University Square, and marking the University precinct with a series of remarkable structures, including the Sidney Myer Asia Centre, the Ian Potter Museum of Art and the Bio21 building.

He played the key role in establishing and subsequently developing Melbourne University Private Limited, a private university established to operate in synergy with the University of Melbourne.

He was initiator and inaugural Chair of Universitas 21, an international association of research intensive universities, and chaired the Board of Universitas 21 Global, a Singapore-based global on-line university established in 2001 as a joint venture between Universitas 21 and The Thomson Corporation.

At the same time he emphasized that the University's ambitions to be a university of the highest quality necessitate strong core disciplines in the sciences and humanities. His vision of a fine university education is one where students' learning is international in outlook, imbued with the values of research culture, and extended by the full range of new technologies.

While Vice-Chancellor of the universities of Tasmania and Melbourne, Professor Gilbert has been a key participant in national policy debates on higher education. He has offered advice informally as well as through his memberships of, for example, the Higher Education Council, the Group of Eight, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. In addition to Universitas 21, his international involvements have included membership of the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong, and participation in conferences of the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

Throughout his term as Vice-Chancellor, Alan Gilbert has stood for the highest standards of collegiality, excellence and fairness. He has constantly challenged the University to confront the challenges of a rapidly changing higher education context, and has led the response to those challenges. His contribution to this University has been inestimable, and there is no doubt that he leaves it in its sesquicentennial year as a stronger, more diverse and more vigorous institution than it has ever been.