



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 104

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY: G.H. Cumming

DATE: 19 January 2004

**Bro. PROFESSOR KENNETH JOHN CABLE, AM, MA.**

Born in Sydney, the young Kenneth Cable demonstrated extraordinary intellectual talents both at high school and university. He was dux of Sydney Boys High School and graduated with first class honours at the University Medal in History from Sydney University in 1950. He then completed an MA in history, writing a thesis on the role of the Anglican Church in colonial New South Wales.

While a post-graduate student he was appointed as a temporary lecturer in history, a position he resigned to take up a travelling scholarship at Cambridge. At King's College he enrolled for Part II of the Historical Tripos, graduating with a First. He then enrolled for a PhD at King's, researching the history of colonial universities of the British Empire.

He came back to a lectureship at the NSW University of Technology (now the University of NSW) but John Ward, the head of the history department at the University of Sydney, soon recruited him "home".

Perhaps what made Cable more comfortable at Sydney University was not only the fact its administration was more congenial towards humanities subjects, but that he also joined a generation of colleagues educated at Sydney. The history department at Sydney made few attempts to recruit from other Australian universities, or, for that matter to engage in intellectual dialogue with them. Rather it sought to ally itself with the universities at Oxford, Cambridge and London.

Cable was a complex character. He was extraordinarily knowledgeable about a huge range of historical subjects extending across Europe, Australia and into north Asia. His mastery of the history of cricket and its statistics was well known and spoken of with awe both within and without academic circles. He liked to display his learning, too, and had a tendency to lecture students and colleagues.

Yet at the same time his character was marked by shyness.

In 1961 Cable seems to have suffered some form of breakdown, one that tempered his self-confidence and perhaps deepened his shyness. Perhaps it also had an impact on his scholarship. From the time he returned to Australia, Cable had published regularly. He had contributed articles on Australian religious history to the *Journal of Religious History* and the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*. He had also begun a series of immaculately researched and wittily written pieces on Australian Anglicans for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

But he never managed to complete and publish a sole-authored, sustained book-length piece of historical research. The Cambridge PhD remained incomplete. He set out to write a history of the Church of England in Australia and by 1967 the first volume was complete. But this project was abandoned in favour of a biographical

register of the Anglican Church in Australia, a collaborative project that he undertook with his wife Leonie.

Cable also became involved in the team writing the history of the University of Sydney, and with Stephen Judd published a path-breaking history of the Anglican diocese of Sydney. For these contributions he was promoted to assistant professor in 1967, one referee noting that if his research output did not match the publishing track records or reflect the international reputations for scholarship of some of his peers, he nevertheless exceeded them in the breadth of his knowledge and the quickness of his intellect.



Kenneth John Cable

Cable possessed a keen sense of service. He served on numerous university boards and committees. He was chair of the board of studies in divinity for some years and was head of the history department from 1987 to 1988. He also enjoyed a long association with St Paul's College.

Outside the university he served as president of the Royal Australian Historical Society and editor of its journal; he was a member of the Heritage Committee and of the advisory council of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

He was also active in church affairs, acting for many years as a warden of St James's Church, Sydney. For his services to history and the community he received the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977, and in 1982 was made a member of the Order of Australia. In 1989 the Australian College of Theology made him an honorary doctor of theology, the first time this degree was

bestowed on an Anglican layman; and in 2003 he was awarded the Australian Dictionary of Biography Medal for outstanding service to the ADB.

Cable retired from the University of Sydney in 1999, already in ill-health. Nevertheless, he continued to be active in church, history and heritage organisations.

He died on 5 September 2003 and was survived by his wife, Leonie, and his two daughters and their families.

Bro. Kenneth John Cable was made a mason on 17 July 1950 in Lodge John Williams No. 148, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales. He was passed Fellowcraft on 13 October 1950 and raised a Master Mason on 9 March 1951.

He was excluded for non-payment of dues on 16 August 1976.



Professor Ken Cable with the medal he received for his work, and long and distinguished service to the Australian Dictionary of Biography. It was presented to him at the State Library in March 2003.

---

REFERENCES:

Richard Waterhouse      *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 17 October 2003.

Rosemary Annable      *History*, December 2003.

The United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory - membership records.

---