

RHODES UNIVERSITYADDRESS BY VICE-CHANCELLOR TO CONVOCATION : 1976

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In offering you a report covering the events of the year 1975 I find myself at something of a disadvantage, since I was installed in office only in October of that year. There is some compensation to this, however, in that the continuity of the University's life, notwithstanding the change in Vice-Chancellors, has been most convincingly demonstrated this morning by the award of an Honorary Doctorate to my predecessor, Dr. J.M. Hyslop. This recognition of his sterling services to and guidance of the University marks our appreciation of his qualities as a man, a scholar and an administrator. Our Chancellor's absence on grounds/.....

grounds

/ of health afforded me the particular privilege of being able to cap Dr. Hyslop, a recompence for having my thunder stolen by the Public Orator's most able peroration this morning.

In recent months the University has lost the services, through retirement, of other valued and distinguished staff members, including the Dean of Students, Professor H.J. Chapman, who was also a serving member of the University Council, and Professor L.A. Hewson, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity. Associate Professors A. Ruddock and J.C. van Hille retired after many years of service to Rhodes, as did the Finance Officer, Mr. H.B.R. Piers. Associate Professor G.W.E.C. Ashby resigned to become

Dean/.....

Dean of Grahamstown, and Dr. H.W. Truter, Senior Lecturer in Afrikaans/  
Nederlands, accepted a Chair at the University of Fort Hare. I also  
record, with deep regret, the death of Dr. R.E. Bolt, Senior Lecturer  
in Zoology.

Recent senior appointments in the University include the Rev.  
J.N. Suggit as Professor of New Testament Studies, Mr. R.C. Best as  
Dean of Students, and Mr. M. Beal as Finance Officer. Dr. A.P. Brink,  
Dr. F.L. Coleman, Mrs. E.R. Hunt, Mr. R. Sargeant and Dr. M. van Wyk  
Smith were promoted to Associate Professor, while the following staff members  
were appointed or promoted to the rank of Senior Lecturer: Dr. R.E. Jacob,  
Mr. J.E. Moulder, Dr. I. Kanfer, Mr. J.A.G. Perry, Mr. K.S. Prinsloo,  
Dr. D. Riordan, Mr. D.P. Steyn, Dr. L.E. Switzer and Dr. B.J. Wilson.

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In general, appointments to the staff of Rhodes are sought after by well qualified applicants both from South Africa and from abroad, and the high standards for which Rhodes has become known are being maintained. In certain disciplines, however, particularly those with a high professional content in which the disparity between academic salaries and those earned in active practice is extreme, the situation does afford a certain cause for concern. Perhaps the remedy lies partially in a more active encouragement of postgraduate studies which hopefully will lead ultimately to more individuals acquiring a firm taste for academic life.

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It continues to be a notable feature of Rhodes life that in addition to their teaching duties, staff members in the various Departments and Research Institutes also render a significant service to the country through their research work, their publications, their public lectures and their participation in a great many cultural and professional organisations and in public life. Their wives also become interested, and often immersed, in higher education, and help to carry its benefits into the community.

With the few additional posts established in the past year, the numerical strength of the academic staff has passed the 200 mark for the first time, and a student-staff ratio of less than 12:1 has been maintained. Whether it will be possible to maintain this important balance in/.....

in the current year, depends on financial factors to which I will refer in a short while.

From 2 306 in 1974, our student numbers rose to 2 370 in 1975. We have had another significant increase this year which is still not finally assessed but which points to a final all-inclusive total of just over 2 500. Of these, 1 493 are accommodated in University residences.

After allowing for special students, for non-resident post-graduate students, and for oppidans from homes in Grahamstown, the balance represents a considerable number of students, certainly more than five hundred, in private accommodation or boarding in the City. In some cases these  
students/.....

students are living in substandard housing, and it clearly is the responsibility of the University to give greater heed to their living and environmental conditions. The general question of student accommodation is giving us much food for thought. Indeed, a special Senate/Council Ad Hoc Committee, including three student members, is in the midst of assessing the whole social, cultural and financial implications of our residence system. A proper balance between residence living and town living is one of the objectives being sought. We shall obviously endeavour, in the interest of our strong residential traditions, to make our residences as attractive to live in as possible. The completion of Cullen Bowles House in the Kimberley residence complex and the preliminary estimates for the costs of further residences of this type, over R7 000 per student, demonstrate that the whole cost structure must be reviewed.

The Council/.....

The Council has already accepted a policy of ensuring that residence fees cover all trading costs, and has itself agreed to assume the interest and redemption burden. The time has surely come to evaluate less expensive forms of student accommodation than traditional concrete frame buildings. The idea of terrace housing in the idiom of the Settler style appeals to me. The result, if imaginatively done, could produce an atmosphere similar to that of Artificers' Square, at a cost per student of a little more than half that of more orthodox approaches.

While on this topic of buildings and construction work, I am happy to report that the imposing new building for the J.L.B. Smith Institute of Ichthyology was completed for occupation early last year, and the Coelacanth now reposes in surroundings more in keeping with its ancestral dignity.

No praise/.....

No praise could be too high, however, for the outstanding work carried out by the late Professor J.L.B. Smith in cramped and totally unsuitable working space in the old Ichthyology building, where he achieved results that brought scientists from all over the world to our doorstep.

At the old Grahamstown Training College, which has now been incorporated into our campus, extensive work is being carried out on renovations, alterations and extensions to prepare the buildings for occupation by departments of the University. Some buildings are already occupied, but the building work is likely to go on for a considerable time. The incorporation of the College complex represents a significant expansion of the physical size of the University, and it would have taken us a great many years to acquire the same number of square metres of accommodation in any other way. We are

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particularly grateful to have St. Mary's Chapel as the University's formal centre of worship. The service marking the start of the academic year was held there in March. On this occasion the keys of the Chapel were presented to me by the Mother Superior of the Community of the Resurrection. We also marked the Twenty-Fifth anniversary of Rhodes as a fully-fledged university.

There are certain other areas too, notably the Prince Alfred Hospital and the Police Headquarters in Prince Alfred Street, which we hope eventually to acquire. We are in consequence engaged in a long term planning exercise. In this respect we have been fortunate in being able to call on the assistance of Professor Wilfrid Mallows to advise us on the placement of future buildings, on pedestrian and vehicular traffic trends and other factors which will

contribute/.....

contribute to the creation of the most effective total human environment.

One consequence of this planning activity is that we are committed to giving careful thought to long-term academic developments, and more particularly, to our concept of the ultimate size of the University. I personally prefer to approach this latter point indirectly by advocating a limit on freshman intake not very much above the present numbers. One could then encourage the better quality students thus forthcoming to complete at least four years of study and offer every inducement to the abler amongst them to remain for postgraduate studies. One factor that we shall not be able to leave out of account is the advocacy by the South African Pharmacy Board of a degree qualification from a residential university as the sole means of entering the profession.

The possibility/.....

The possibility of a Rhodes presence in East London, on the model of Potchefstroom University's activities in Vanderbylpark, is also being actively pursued. This proposal, too, if it reaches fruition, will have a profound effect on our future.

With a pavilion still to be provided, the work of levelling and surfacing the new sports stadium on the Prospect House site has been completed, and the first sports event was staged on the athletics track last year. The new gfields will help us to cater for growing student numbers requiring these facilities.

Extensive alterations to the interior of the Main Building have been carried out in stages over the past two years, and construction work has  
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started on the fourth side of the quadrangle. Very soon, therefore, the humorous description of our quadrangle as "The unfinished symphony" will not longer be appropriate. It is interesting to note that the Main Building, quadrangle included, was designed by Baker and Kendall in 1911, and the water-colour sketches hanging in the Committee Room will show to what extent we have adhered to or departed from the details of their design. But the basic lay-out of the building as they designed it always remained the guiding pattern when sections were erected in 1914, 1922, 1928, 1935 and 1949. Now, after 65 years, the final stage is under construction.

Finances have been a great source of worry for many years. In spite of the ravages of inflation we came out of 1975 without any serious deficit, except in the case of the residences, where we were more than R100 000 in the red. The alternative funding of interest and redemption, to which I have already referred, will make the picture a little less dismal in coming years.

Nonetheless, an accumulated residence deficit of over R400 000 is a very worrisome feature of the accounts. Some careful and out of the ordinary measure will have to be devised to relieve us of this crushing burden.

The picture for 1976 is a somewhat more optimistic one in that an additional subsidy component for small universities, to the nett extent of some R280 000, has become available. Provided continued inflation does not exact too heavy a toll we have some prospect of balancing the books.

It is a pleasure to record, too, the steadily increasing support we are enjoying from our donors, under the able stewardship of Mr. J.N. Papenfus our Director of Public Relations and Development. This support amounted to over R360 000 in 1975. We are particularly grateful for the contributions from members of Convocation, whose generosity is an enormous contributory

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factor to the University's continued wellbeing. The most munificent gift of all, however, has not been a monetary one, but that of the most extensive available collection of C.J. Rhodes' papers, shortly to be formally presented to us by Gold Fields of South Africa Ltd.

These factors in no sense justify any grounds for complacency, and I have embarked upon extensive planning for improving the effectiveness of the University's operations. The Council has also directed that particular scrutiny should be exercised over the filling of vacant posts with permanent appointments. I am firmly wedded too to the concept of substantial improvements in the skills, conditions of service and emoluments of our Black staff. This inevitably means that over the years their numerical preponderance in relation to other staff members will be reduced. I say this in the full knowledge/.....

knowledge of the grossly inadequate employment prospects, and social and economic situation of Grahamstown's Black citizens. It seems to me that one way out of this difficulty is to employ every means that our imaginations can devise to retain the highest possible percentage of Rhodes' spending power in Grahamstown, thereby creating more indirect employment opportunities.

After two years without a Students' Representative Council, the student body elected a Council last year on the basis of an amended constitution, and with an extraordinarily high vote turnout. The new SRC has set about its work in an efficient and pleasing manner which holds out great promise for the future. The Senior Students in the Halls too have helped to point the way to what an effective student Leadership can mean in the way of increased morale, responsibility/.....

responsibility and commitment.

Our student body continues to yield a high percentage of outstanding achievers who more than hold their own in open competition for academic honours and awards at national level. In the field of sport, the University, in 1975, produced two internationals, 44 Provincial players, and 15 Junior Provincial players, while 26 were selected for S.A. Universities sides.

My saddest news I have retained until the end. Mr. Justice J.D. Cloete, who is both Chairman of Council and your Chairman, indicated to the Council at its December meeting his intention to retire from office at an opportune date during the year. This means that today is the last occasion at which he will preside over our annual gathering. Dante, as we all know, is modest to a fault, and it has been impossible to extract any details of his extraordinary/.....



extraordinary services to Convocation and to the University as a whole, and more particularly of his work on the Council and latterly as Chairman. Indeed, he has expressly enjoined me not to dwell on the subject on this occasion. When he chooses to announce the exact date, we shall have to employ some indirect, even some devious, means of piecing the record together, in order to pay him proper tribute. I for one should like to express my gratitude for the patient way in which he has always been available with information, advice and encouragement as I slowly eased my way into the Vice-Cancellarian driver's seat. Best wishes, Dante, in all that you will have to accomplish, and I hope perhaps a little forlornly, that you really will be able to find the time for all that gardening that you have been promising yourself.

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