

16/4/83

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT TO CONVOCATION

Mr President, Mr Chancellor, fellow members of Convocation, it is two years since I last addressed a gathering of the Convocation of Rhodes University. Last year my wife and I were away from April to September, enjoying a very necessary break from the pressures of Vice-Chancellorhood. I am happy to report that all went smoothly during my absence, thanks very largely to the sterling efforts of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brommert, and Professor Kerr, who acted as Vice-Principal, firstly during my absence, and secondly when Professor Brommert was unfortunately taken ill soon after my return. Professor Brommert, who had to have a serious back operation has now fully recovered and as you can see, it right back in harness again.

The most significant aspect of the year 1982 for Rhodes University was the large increase in student numbers. For the first time in history, our enrolment exceeded 3 000, and on census day in June, there were 3 202 students, a $7\frac{1}{2}\%$ increase over last year's figure. This was the highest percentage increase of any White university in South Africa. At the same time we faced a very high increase in the number of applications for 1983. While this was certainly a pleasant position in which to find ourselves, we needed to take a rational look at the situation before reacting to it. Clearly, Rhodes is a "small" university and will remain so. As things stand at the moment, official university residential accommodation is limited to approximately 1 830, and the small community of Grahamstown has reached saturation point as far as the provision of Oppidan digs is concerned. We were therefore left with the necessity of containing student numbers in the way most advantageous to an institution that strives after academic excellence. We achieved this by introducing an entrance qualification based on academic ability. In this way the "bottom" 10% of applicants, those with, on average, E aggregate, were screened out of our 1983 first year enrolment. At the same time, we have launched a fully fledged academic support programme. This programme, while operating mainly for students who came from academically disadvantaged backgrounds, also offers courses in study skills to all our students. We hope that the combination of a higher basic standard of ability in our students coupled with better education in how to benefit from academic opportunity will together raise academic standards at Rhodes University in the years to come.

With the students all satisfactorily hard at work, we can now turn our attention to the university staff. Once again we have had a stable year in terms of staff turnover. One major loss was the retirement of Professor E E Locke from the post of Head of the Department of Physical Education after a magnificent innings of 33 years. Our gratitude and good wishes go with Professor Locke and his wife Mrs H Locke, who was a lecturer in psychology, in their very well deserved retirement. We were also sad to have to accept the resignation of Professor Roy Sargeant from his post as head of the Department of Speech and Drama in June. Professor Sargeant had not only built up an excellent department at Rhodes but had also helped to put both Rhodes and Grahamstown on the cultural map of South Africa by helping to develop the enormously successful annual festival of the Arts at the Settlers' Monument. However, Professor Sargeant's new position as head of English Drama at SABC TV in Auckland Park gives us a somewhat proprietorial interest in TV plays as we settle down in front of our television sets of an evening.

Professor R Mason, organizer of our highly successful geology Masters course in mineral exploration left us at the end of the year to take up a departmental headship in Ontario, Canada. His place has been taken by a widely experienced geologist from New Zealand, Professor F M C Pirajno.

A note of disappointment during the year was the rejection by the Department of National Education of our application for a full degree in Agricultural Economics. We were therefore not surprised, although saddened, by the resignation of Professor G Antrobus, who was offered the Professorship in that subject at neighbouring Fort Hare.

Other losses in our ranks which must be mentioned were caused by the deaths of several of our staff members. In August the death occurred of Mr G W Randell, Principal Technical Officer in Chemistry, and in December Mr C Stevenson, caterer at Oriel Hall, died suddenly. An ex-member of staff whose absence from Convocation today is a bitter blow, is Professor Hugh Chapman. Professor Chapman, whose long and distinguished service to the University was an example to all Rhodians, died peacefully in July last year after a long illness. To his wife Jean, who was also a good and loyal friend to Rhodes, and to their children, both of whom are Old Rhodians, we extend our deepest sympathy.

Student life, too, was hit by a number of deaths, all on the road. As a result of these fatalities, the university authorities are now throwing their weight more clearly than before behind the Student Representative Councils' road safety consciousness programme and anti-alcohol abuse campaign.

Four new heads of department were appointed during the year - Professor G Staude became head of the department of Business Administration in January. In July, Old Rhodian Professor J Charteris returned from Canada to take over the department of Physical Education, and Professor W Kotzé moved from the University of Cape Town to take up the post of head of the department of mathematics (pure and applied). In December Professor F Swart arrived fresh from the artistic directorship of PACT to devote his considerable verve and talent to the Rhodes department of Speech and Drama.

Several new courses have recently been introduced. Together with other language departments, the Department of Afrikaans en Nederlands has introduced a first course in modern fiction in translation. In the Department of Business Administration, a new course, Business Data Processing has been introduced under the guidance of Professor M Sainsbury. The newly-named Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry has had a Chair in Biochemistry subvented by South African Breweries. This position is shortly to be filled.

Two closely linked developments took place in the new department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Sciences: In October construction began of a fish culture unit, and in February this year a postgraduate diploma in fish culture was introduced for the first time.

The Department of Journalism has also introduced a diploma course this year, concentrating on the practical aspects of journalism and open to students with any kind of first degree. The Department of Philosophy has a new senior lectureship, sponsored by an international Christian body, which enables us to offer another philosophical viewpoint, that of Reformational Philosophy. The post has been filled by Dr E J J Echeverria, a Mexican-born American with an Old Rhodian wife.

Another project which reached fruition at the beginning of this year was the publishing of a new University Calendar and Student Handbook. The Calendar has been rendered both more comprehensive and - we trust - more comprehensible. The Student Handbook is a totally new compendium of all the information a student could possibly need on coming to Rhodes. These two publications represent a full year of painstaking work on the part of the editor, and I would like to record our thanks to Mrs Fiona Croeser for the dedication she showed in seeing this mammoth task through to completion.

A feature of the year which should be of particular interest to members of Convocation was the resuscitation, under the editorship of Mr Mark Horn, of the student yearbook, Rhodian which had not been published for seven years. The venture, normally the preserve of the Students' Representative Council, was financed by this Convocation. However, it would seem that from now on the responsibility will return to the capable hands of the SRC.

With the continued rapid expansion of computer usage, it became increasingly obvious that the mainframe computer would have to be replaced with larger capacity equipment. A Control Data mainframe computer was therefore purchased and installed at a cost of just over R700 000.

Exciting progress has been made on the Quad II building project, with the new English department building almost having reached completion, and the whole complex gradually emerging from a chrysalis of dusty heaps of bricks and bulldozers to become gracious buildings already harmonising with the existing campus. The first buildings should be ready for occupation very shortly. It is amazing for those of us who have been here for many years to realize that there are students at Rhodes who have never seen the central campus other than as a hive of building activity. We hope that peace will descend sufficiently during 1983 for everyone to experience the tranquil beauty that is such a hallmark of our campus.

Already in their new building are the expanding numbers of part-time B Com students in East London. The old Wool Exchange was officially opened as Rhodes University East London Division in February last year, and a complete overhaul and facelift was completed in time for the beginning of the 1983 academic year. Examination results in November compared very favourably with those of our full-time Grahamstown students, and enrolment for 1983 has justified the appointment of a total of five permanent academic staff in East London. At the same time the Division is becoming an adult education centre much appreciated by the citizens of East London.

The Rhodes University Foundation, whose members constitute the Board of Governors of the University had another successful year under the Chairmanship of Dr J B Sutherland. For the second year in succession, the University received over R1m in donations, and interest and investment dividends totalled over R500 000. Also, I was pleased and proud to be able to announce this morning that Rhodes University has received its largest ever single donation: R $\frac{1}{2}$ m from Gold Fields South Africa towards the costs of a new university residence. Until such time as the Department of National Education grants the University permission to raise a loan, the Rhodes University Foundation will lend the University a further R $\frac{1}{2}$ m as bridging finance to meet the total cost of R1m. Other new plans for residences include the construction of a R250 000 extension to Stanley Kidd Annexe and the construction of eight two and three bedroomed flats for use by married students. Both these projects are due for completion very shortly. The University received a valuable gift from the Chancellor Dr I Mackenzie who donated the historic building Temlett House to the University. It is being used as a residence for men students.

The lifeblood of a university is of course its students and one of the most important activities of all universities in South Africa is that of contact with prospective students through school visits, attendance at careers exhibitions, and the provision of informative material to school psychologists, or vocational guidance teachers as they were more commonly called. The Rhodes Schools Liaison Officer spends much of her time travelling round South Africa meeting pupils and teachers from many different centres. The University has a specially constructed portable stand to use at the careers exhibitions which are being held with increasing frequency at all major and many minor centres.

The Old Rhodian Union held its Annual General Meeting on Founder's Day last year, at which both the previous Chairman, The Hon Mr Justice J D Cloete and the Honorary Secretary, Professor D E A Rivett resigned, Professor Rivett after 20 years in the post. Professor J A Gledhill was elected Chairman and Dr G Gruber Honorary Secretary. The year saw the usual number of Old Rhodian Reunions held throughout the country, each attended by one of our professors. A particularly pleasing note was the tremendous response by Old Rhodians to a postcard included in the December Newsletter. The card was intended to elicit correct addresses and personal news from Old Rhodians, and this it certainly did. What emerged with unfailing regularity was the warm and vital memories that Rhodians of every generation retain of their days at Rhodes. If a university can be said to succeed, then proof of this can be measured mainly if not wholly in the achievements, combined with the appreciation of its old students. In this respect Rhodes can clearly be seen as a truly successful institute of higher learning.

Dr D S Henderson
VICE-CHANCELLOR

16 April 1983