

Resolution of Council

29 July 2024

Item 3.1

Vale Donald Denoon

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I wish to inform Council of the passing of Emeritus Professor Donald John Noble Denoon, academic, author and Pyrmont community stalwart on 3 July 2024.

Donald was born on 29 July, 1940 in Scotland. He later wrote that his route to Pyrmont was “poorly signposted”. After moving to South Africa, he gained a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) at the University of Natal in 1961. A teaching career followed. Donald later earned a PhD at the University of Cambridge, where he met his first wife, Pamela.

In 1966, the couple moved to Uganda where Donald took up a teaching post at Makerere University and Pamela gave birth to their three children. After Idi Amin’s coup in 1971, life in Uganda became ugly. Donald, Pamela and their children, left for Port Moresby where Donald was appointed Professor of History at the University of Papua New Guinea.

In 1982, the Denoon family moved to Canberra, where Donald became a professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University. Pamela became active in the Women’s Electoral Lobby and Donald organised support for the African National Congress. Six years later, Pamela died from leukemia after a two-year illness.

In February 1992, Donald married his long-time friend, Mary Mortimer, whom he helped write a book about bereavement. When he retired, Donald and Mary lived together in Pyrmont where they quickly made friends and became increasingly involved in the wider Pyrmont community and its various organisations.

With others, Donald established the Pymont History Group “to promote debate about Pymont's place in the world”. He said:

“The History project opened my eyes to Pymont's layered complexity. There are traces of centuries when Eora and others fished these rich waters; John Harris VI described the dominant dynasty founded by surgeon Harris; and there are ample records of the brutal conditions endured by wharfies and quarrymen - and their trade unions and the formation of the Labor Party. Michael Matthews, Clover Moore and Frank Sartor loosened Labor's grip and launched the era of Independent City councillors”.

In 2017, the History Group published *Women of Pymont* and earlier this year, the group published *Men of Pymont*, edited by Donald. “Winning the Lottery” was the title he gave to his own chapter. It ended with:

“My life before Pymont was outrageously lucky. A lecturer's question rescued me from South Africa's segregated classrooms to transnational academe. My miracles have come in pairs. I have twice been appointed to chairs for which I was not qualified. I met the notorious Idi Amin twice, and both times he was in a benign mood. Above all, I have been happily married twice, surely beyond the national average? I thought my life was nearly over when I retired to Pymont. How wrong I was! Despite my best efforts to avoid this fate, I arrived in the liveliest, most diverse and most fascinating community in this city.”

Donald was a kind and clever gentleman who will be missed by all who knew him.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor)

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Donald Denoon and his contribution to the Pymont community and academic research;
- (B) Council express its condolences to Donald's widow, Mary Mortimer, his family, many friends and the Pymont community; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor convey Council's condolences to Donald's widow, Mary Mortimer.

Carried unanimously.

S051491

Note – All Councillors, staff and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Donald Denoon.