During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the English-born immigrants who had dominated public life in the first 20 years of Queensland's existence as a separate colony began to give way to the first generation of native-born sons. Not that native-born Queenslanders had the field exclusively; young men from the older colonies also came on to the Queensland scene. One of these was Pope Alexander Cooper, born in New South Wales at Lake George on 12 May 1846(1). Parliamentarian then Judge, later knighted, he was the first Australian-born Chief Justice of Queensland.

But we digress. One characteristic all these men had in common was their comparative youth when they first achieved prominence in public life. Pope Cooper was Attorney General in his early thirties and a judge before the age of 40. James Howard Gill became Crown Solicitor at the age of twenty-seven(2). Thomas Joseph Byrnes was Solicitor General before he was 30, then Attorney General followed by a brief Premiership of five months before his death at the age of 37(3)

The subject of this paper, James William Blair, followed the example of his distinguished predecessors in that he first achieved prominence at an early age.

He was born at Coalfalls, Ipswich, Queensland on 16 May 1871 the younger son of Gordon Blair, a clerk and locker in the
Customs Department, a branch of the Department of the Colonial Treasury, and Julia (nee Droughton) his wife. His birth was never registered but 16 May 1871 is the date recorded at The Ipswich Grammar School, in *Men in Queensland 1915*, in C. A. Bernays' *Queensland — Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930* (p. 342), *Queensland Government Gazette*, Monday 22 December 1924 Vol. 123 No. 213 p. 2613 and newspapers (e.g. *Brisbane Courier* 17 September 1903, p. 5). Yet when he died on 18 November 1944 his death certificate gives his age as 74 years which indicates 1870 as the year of his birth\(^{(4)}\). The weight of the evidence seems to favour 1871.

His early education has been attributed to his mother, who was evidently a woman of personality and left a profound and lasting impression on her son\(^{(5)}\). Later he attended the Ipswich West State School which was under the headmastership of Mr. E. Barnes\(^{(6)}\). He was enrolled at the Ipswich Grammar School on 6 March 1882, Roll No. 448, along with his elder brother Henry Gordon Blair who was born on 21 August 1867. Henry left school in December 1882, but James continued there until the end of 1888. He was actively engaged in school life and affairs. There is a record in the School Magazine of March 1888 that James Blair played a pianoforte solo at Speech Day, December 1887. He was on the committee of the Library and Debating Society in 1888. Notes from this society of 2 March 1888 read: "The piece de resistance was an essay on 'Trifles' by J. W. Blair. It was clever, it was witty, and showed that the writer keeps his eyes open. The paper was one of the best read before the society and well merited the applause with which it was received". Blair was applauded for his piano solo "Il Corricolo Galo". He also recited "Sir John Franklin" feelingly. The mellifluous voice of later years was exercising its magic already. He was secretary of the Natural History and Science Society in 1888 as well.


The Magazine of April 1889 records: "J. W. Blair is reading for the preliminary Bar examinations. J. W. Blair has paid court to the Muses for some time and we congratulate him on the publication of his poetic efforts, which we have read in the local press with some pleasure".

The Magazine of June 1889, has a poem published under the title "The Cane" (page 158). The last stanza reads:
"Then he swings me on high — with a rush down I fly —
Then the boy, howling, goes to his seat;
Then once more I'm laid by — in a cupboard I lie.
Till another requires — a like treat”.

His contributions continued to appear in the school magazine. In September 1889 is a poem entitled “Our Janitor” (p. 194), whilst in the magazine of March 1890 is another poem — “Day Dawn in the Holidays” (p. 14) — regarded as quite a commendable effort. Blair never forgot his alma mater, and the Ipswich Grammar School, for its part, often referred to its distinguished alumnus.(7)

Blair’s reading for the Bar preliminary examinations (which could be done in two divisions) was carried out under the aegis of Frederick ffoulkes Swanwick(8) a former Queensland Parliamentarian and barrister and schoolmaster. Swanwick’s out-of-town pupils apparently resided with him, as correspondence from the Board of Examiners for barristers in 1891 is addressed to Blair c/- F.f.f. Swanwick, Norman Park, Brisbane. Later correspondence relating to the final examinations which were held on 12 and 13 February 1894 is addressed to him at Coalfalls, Ipswich.(9)

Success attended Blair in his bar finals and he was admitted to the Queensland Bar on 6 March 1894. His admission was moved by Dr. A. H. Boone, a B.A., LL.B. and LL.D. of the Royal University of Ireland. It is interesting to note that the highly qualified Boone had been compelled by the Queensland Board of Examiners for Barristers to sit for (and pass) the Queensland bar finals in April 1893 before he was allowed to practise in Queensland.(10)

**LINK WITH T. J. BYRNES**

In 1894 Blair became acquainted with another “native son”, the then Attorney General Thomas Joseph Byrnes.

Byrnes was the “boy wonder” type, whose career in retrospect became legendary. Born in humble circumstances at Brisbane on 11 November 1860 he successively won scholarships and exhibitions which took him from the Bowen State School via the Brisbane Grammar School to Melbourne University in 1877, from whence he graduated B.A. (Hons.) in 1882 and LL.B. on 19 April 1884. Admitted to the Victorian Bar on 8 July 1884, he returned to Queensland and was admitted to the Bar on 5 August 1884. By 1890 he had built up a successful practice and had attracted the attention of Sir Samuel Griffith, the Premier and
Attorney General. Byrnes was appointed to the Legislative Council and took office as Solicitor General and Government leader in the Upper House. In 1893 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly, took office as Attorney General, and remained in this office until April 1898 when he became Premier at the age of 37 years. His triumph was short-lived, for on 27 September that year he died, cut down initially by measles but in fact by pneumonia and cardiac failure which followed on the heels of the normally childish complaint.\(^{(11)}\)

I have dealt with Byrnes at some length because of his influence on Blair and, to a degree, the manner in which their careers paralleled. After their initial acquaintanceship ripened into friendship Blair shared chambers with Byrnes until the death of the latter. Over 20 years later (about 1919) Blair wrote "A Memoir and a Retrospect" on Byrnes in which he said, inter alia: "We became acquainted some time in 1894 and the friendship then established lasted till I stood beside his death-bed at Yeronga. At the age I was then, I was a hero-worshipper. Byrnes was my hero".\(^{(12)}\)

From his school days on, as will have been noted, Blair had received encomiums for his mastery of both written and spoken English. He also possessed other attributes that could make for success in public speaking — he could be forceful, his voice was particularly pleasant and he had "many graces of speech". His practice at the Bar burgeoned and he was soon in demand for criminal cases where the oratory of the advocate often can be a compelling factor in a defendant client’s favour.\(^{(13)}\)

Despite his success in the forensic sphere his exposure to politicians minor (in the person of Swanwick) and major (Byrnes, Premier at the age of 37) appears to have had its effect on him. For, in 1902, the successful young lawyer is found to be a contestant in the general election for the Legislative Assembly held on 11 March that year. He stood as an independent candidate for the seat of Ipswich, which at that time returned two members to the lower house. Blair gained second place in the ballot after Thomas Bridson Cribb, a member since 1896, who had previously achieved Ministerial rank in 1901. In gaining the second seat Blair also achieved a measure of notoriety, if not fame, by papering Ipswich with little dodgers about an inch square bearing the humble legend “Give Jimmy a Vote”. There was only one Jimmy on the ballot paper, and sufficient of the electors indeed gave him a vote\(^{(14)}\). He was then 30 years old.
For one who subsequently gained a reputation as being something of a bon vivant, his Parliamentary policy at this stage contained constraints which indicated the crusading zeal of a young man. He was opposed to any attempt to open public houses on Sunday, and favoured the rigorous enforcement of the Licensing Act. He wanted to see the limitation of hours of sale in bars to the same as shops under the Factories and Shops Acts, whilst he would close hotels on polling day. He favoured more stringent enforcement of the Gambling Act, the minimisation of Sunday labour, the suppression of Sunday trading, and the prohibition of the sale of tobacco to children. In the field of education he would seek to have State scholarships subject to a restriction that they could be taken out at State grammar schools only. The scholars of any school granting scholarships and bursaries should not be entitled to compete for State scholarships. It was time that the State took over the grammar schools entirely and it should grant more scholarships to those schools. He would do away also with the liability of State school committees (of parents etc.) to make a one-fifth contribution towards the repair of schools and school residences.

In other fields he wanted the provisions of the Factories and Shops Acts extended to the whole State; he sought to have polls opened to all electors and not to ratepayers only. He favoured local option and was opposed to compensation for re-licensing of public houses. (15)

After a bare 18 months as a private member, on 17 September 1903, he received the first recognition of and tribute to his talents. Sir Arthur Morgan formed a Government, but needed an Attorney General. It was still considered necessary for this Minister to have a legal background, for after all he was the Crown Law Officer. The independent member for Ipswich was invited to accept this portfolio. He accepted and thus became a Minister of the Crown at the age of 32 and ex officio the leader of the Queensland bar. (16)

For the next five years with one short break Blair held Ministerial rank in the Queensland Parliament. He was Morgan’s Attorney General from 17 September 1903 and was given the additional portfolio of Mines on 27 April 1904. These he continued to hold under Kidston’s premiership when Morgan, following the death of Sir Hugh Nelson (on 1 January 1906), became President of the Legislative Council and Lieutenant-Governor on 19 January 1906. (17)
Gordon Blair, his father, had died at Ipswich on 23 August 1900 a few weeks before his 67th birthday\(^{(18)}\). This was a sad event in what appears to have been a most united family. Yet, in 1906, on 20 September, the young Attorney General was to suffer
the even sadder loss of Julia, his mother, who had made such a profound impression on her son in his formative years.\(^{19}\)

The *Brisbane Courier* gave very full coverage to the death of Mrs. Blair on the day following. It mentioned her kind and cheerful disposition and that she was a general favourite. Numerous expressions of sympathy had been received by the family from all parts of the State. Messages of condolence had come from the Governor and Lady Chelmsford, the Premier (Kidston) and other Ministerial colleagues, Sir Alexander Pope Cooper (the Chief Justice), Mrs. Real (in the absence of His Honour Mr. Justice Real at the Roma Circuit Court), members of both houses of the legislature, the legal profession, heads of State departments, commercial men and citizens generally.

Flags on public buildings and business premises and the Queensland and Johnsonian Clubs were hoisted half-mast. The Chief Justice adjourned the Supreme Court on 21 September as a mark of respect. The offices of the Mines Department were closed also, whilst on Saturday morning 22 September the Justice Department and sub-departments were closed.

It was stated that the late Mrs. Blair arrived in Brisbane from West Meath, Ireland, about 1860. She married Gordon Blair, who had arrived in Queensland, also about 1860 from Glasgow, in Brisbane in 1864. They moved to William Street, off Harlin Road, Ipswich where they spent the rest of their lives. Mrs. Blair was survived by a daughter Mrs. Isabella Dunn Stanley of Harlin Road, Ipswich, and Mr. Henry Gordon Blair and the Hon. James William Blair her sons.\(^{20}\)

The funeral was held on 22 September 1906. After a service at the deceased’s house the cortege moved to the pavilion at the Ipswich Cemetery as it was raining. The cortege was estimated to be one-and-a-half miles in length and there were about 200 vehicles in it. The published list of those in attendance, apart from the immediate family, reads like a “Who’s Who” of contemporary South-eastern Queensland. The Rev. C. S. Hamlyn Harris, M.A., Rector of St. Paul’s Church of England, Ipswich, conducted the service, and the church choir led by Mr. Perry rendered a full choir service.\(^{21}\)

The lot of the historian has been made much harder so far as descriptive reports from newspapers are concerned. Thirty-eight years later Mrs. Julia Blair’s son James died and received only a fraction of the newspaper space devoted to her death and obsequies. Now it is even less space that is given, and the accuracy of what is reported is doubtful both as to facts and even spelling.
The short break in Blair’s Ministerial appointments occurred during the brief interregnum of the Philp Government from 19 November 1907 to 18 February 1908. He received his old portfolios back when Kidston returned to power on 18 February 1908. He lost them in the Ministerial reshuffle of 19 October 1908.(22)

MINISTERIAL ACHIEVEMENTS

As the last date represented a watershed in his life, it would be appropriate to examine Blair’s principal works as a Minister of the Crown up to then. His ability as an orator had received wide acclaim in the Press, from members of the legal profession and from the Clerk of Parliament, C. A. Bernays, who was later the historian of the Parliament some years after Blair had left that arena(23). I can remember members of the legal profession, both barristers and solicitors, who had been in practice during Blair’s heyday at the Bar, unanimously supporting the proposition that if the need arose, especially in a criminal trial, Jimmy Blair could make a jury weep.

Blair’s first piece of major legislation was the Workers’ Compensation Act which he steered through the third session of the 15th Parliament in the latter part of 1905. It was considered to be a useful addition to the industrial laws from the protective point of view(24). The Act with annotations was published by Blair, Thomas MacLeod (a Brisbane barrister) and Thomas William McCawley (a young lawyer and Blair’s private secretary) as joint authors at Brisbane through the Law Book Company of Australia Ltd. The preface points out that the legislation introduces a principle entirely new to the Statute Book of Queensland, but which has been the subject of much judicial explanation in the United Kingdom.

Blair had little success with his mining legislation. In 1905 a Mining Act Amendment Bill failed to become law, whilst in 1906 a measure to consolidate and amend the laws relating to mining fields, mines and mining was not proceeded with beyond the second reading. (25)

In 1905 Blair and R. A. Ranking, Police Magistrate, with the assistance of Thomas MacLeod, had revised and edited the Queensland Police Code and Justices’ Manual of the Criminal Law (founded on the celebrated Police Code of Sir Howard Vincent, the English expert in these matters).

Another piece of social legislation which Blair piloted through Parliament was the Children’s Court Act 1907. This took offen-
ders under 17 years of age into special Children’s Courts where the charges were heard *in camera*. It had been recognised that the usual environment of courts of justice was not conducive to the well-being of young people. In the same year a Technical Instruction Bill was put through the Assembly by Blair but was not returned by the Legislative Council.\(^{(26)}\)

It was in the first session of the 17th Parliament in 1908 that Blair produced and steered through the House, two measures which were to play a part nine years later in the Ryan Government’s efforts to abolish the Legislative Council.

In November 1907 the Council refused to pass a Trades Disputes Bill and an Election Act Amendment Bill. Kidston sought to appoint enough Councillors to have these measures passed. Lord Chelmsford, the Governor, refused this, as he said Kidston had no mandate to increase the size of the Upper House. Kidston asked for a dissolution, was refused, so resigned. Philp tried to form a Government, was defeated and thereupon sought and was granted, to Kidston’s consternation, a dissolution. The ensuing election was a triumph for Kidston, and on his return to power with a large following in February 1908 he sought to resolve future impasses with the Upper House by constitutional means. Firstly Blair brought down an amendment of the Queensland Constitution repealing the proviso to section 9 (amendment of the constitution) which required a two-thirds majority on the second and third readings of Bills to amend the Constitution. This was passed by Parliament and paved the way to another Constitutional amendment — the Parliamentary Bills Referendum Act — under which measures rejected by the Council, or which the Council refused to pass in the form in which the Assembly desired, in two consecutive sessions, could be submitted to the people by way of referendum and, if approved, automatically became law.

**HISTORIC CAR JOURNEY**

In 1908, between the first and second sessions of Parliament, Blair decided to take advantage of the recess to accede to numerous requests that he should travel from place to place and familiarise himself with the wants and requirements of particular districts in remote parts of Queensland. He decided to make the trip by motor car, using his 1905 4-cylinder 25-30 horsepower Panhard car, because of the limited time at his disposal. His party consisted of Messrs. A. D. Murphy (owner of Northampton Downs, a Queensland pastoral property a hundred
square miles in area), H. N. Leach (special representative of the 
Courier and Queenslander), J. D. O'Hagan (his private secretary 
for the office of Attorney General) and C.E. Hall (chauffeur). 
Thomas William McCawley, the private secretary of Blair's ear-
erlier years in the Ministry, had moved on to the Crown Law 
Office whence he was to rise swiftly to high office.

The party assembled at Blackall, distant 774 miles by rail from 
Brisbane. There they had a week of entertainment, the town 
being en fete for the official opening of the railway and the 
annual show.

Blair was impressed when he observed the part taken by arte-
sian water in transforming the surface of the country. "Sandy 
tracts without trees or herbage of any kind have been changed 
into smiling gardens and rich orchards by its use".

They left Blackall on the morning of 23 May 1908 and with a 
stop at Barcaldine Downs homestead, covered the 80 miles to 
Barcaldine in a little over four hours. On 26 May they set out for 
Longreach and, after a short stay for lunch at Tara homestead, 
arrived there at sunset. Next day, leaving Longreach in the after-
noon, they made their way to Winton; a journey of over 140 
miles, and they did not arrive until 10.20 p.m. The acetylene 
lights on the car were not working properly and the night part of 
the journey was made in semi-darkness. The perils of travelling 
stock and deep wheel ruts, however, were successfully overcome.

On 28 May they lunched at Elderslie station, 47 miles from 
Winton. Mr. Ramsay of Elderslie sent his chauffeur to show 
them the road to Cloncurry; somehow he managed to put them 
on the road to Boulia. Fortunately they met Mr. Willis Allen of 
Toolebuc station travelling in the opposite direction in his 
Minerva touring car. Turning to retrace their tracks with him, 
they met Mr. Ramsay coming towards them in his Vulcan car to 
rectify the mistake which his chauffeur had made. Blair 
remarked on the remarkable nature of the incident — the meet-
ing of the only three automobiles in the vast north-west. Once on 
the right road they reached Kynuna station about 105 miles from 
Winton and spent the night there.

On 29 May, Kynuna to Mackinlay proved to be good travelling 
and 55 miles was traversed in one hour and 20 minutes. That 
night they arrived at Cloncurry, 800 miles from Blackall, and the 
Panhard had established a record as the first motor car to make 
the journey.
On 30 May they made a start for Mount Elliott and Hampden copper mines. The two guides they took misdirected them and once more they found themselves bound for Boulia. After a night spent in the open, they retraced their tracks and after 14 miles met a friendly carrier who gave them breakfast and directed them to Mount Elliott. Like many others in the far west, the carrier had never seen a motor car before. After inspecting the copper mine at Mount Elliott they went on to Hampden mine and spent the night there, returning to Cloncurry on 2 June. The journey from Cloncurry to Richmond was made by rail on 4 June so the new line to Cloncurry could be inspected. On 5 June they motored from Richmond to Hughenden and had the experience of motoring through a plague of grasshoppers which took them seven minutes to get through. From Hughenden to Muttaburra 150 miles to the south was their next stage, followed by a 100 mile run on 7 June to Barcaldine. They had been absent less than a fortnight, had travelled almost 2000 miles and there had been one puncture — the only one of the whole trip — and it had occurred near Muttaburra. After visiting Clermont, Emerald and Anakie, Blair returned to Blackall and thence to Northampton Downs where he spent four days. The run from there to Charleville, 200 miles, was covered in eight hours. From Charleville, 483 miles west of Brisbane, to Warra proved something of a horror stretch, but nevertheless the trip to Brisbane was made in four-and-a-half days. They had then covered some 3500 miles in a little over a fortnight’s travelling time, and Blair felt he had demonstrated the utility of motor ‘transit’ in the heart of Queensland.

**REFUSAL OF JUDGESHIP**

Blair wrote an account of his journey which appeared in "Travel and Exploration", April 1909. Yet, by then he had gone into political eclipse. Kidston had spent the recess in a visit to the United Kingdom. On his return he found if he was to continue to govern, he would have to coalesce with the Philp-ite Opposition. To achieve this successfully some Opposition members had to be brought into the Cabinet. Blair was one of the former Ministers who underwent relegation. It has been maintained on his behalf that Kidston had promised him a southern Supreme Court judgeship for standing down from the Ministry. Yet when the official offer was made it was for the northern judgeship at Townsville so that Mr. Justice Chubb who had been there over 15 years could be brought to Brisbane. Blair refused the offer, with the result that he was neither Judge nor Attorney General, but a mere private member of Parliament.
The *Brisbane Courier* reported on the matter:

"Something like a sensation was created in political circles yesterday following on the swearing-in of members of the Ministry. When the names were announced it was seen that the late Attorney General (Hon. J. W. Blair) was not included in the list of Ministers, and it became known that Mr. Blair had been offered the fifth seat on the Supreme Court Bench. Soon after the Ministers returned from Government House, Mr. Blair attended at the Chief Secretary's Department by invitation and it soon became known that he had refused the offer of judgeship on the condition laid down that he should go to Townsville to permit of the transfer of Mr. Justice Chubb to Brisbane.

"The Premier's statement of the position was in the following words: 'In making the changes in the Ministry I had been led to believe that it was really desirable to appoint a fifth Judge of the Supreme Court and we proposed to bring His Honour Mr. Justice Chubb to Brisbane from Townsville, believing that it was better to bring the Senior Judge, who had had a long experience on the Bench, extending over 15 years, to Brisbane, where Judges are required to constitute the Full Court, and to send the younger man to Townsville. But the younger man declines to go to Townsville, preferring to take his chance in the House. He is disappointed at not getting a position in Brisbane, which he thinks he is entitled to as the late Attorney-General'.

"I do not see any ground for reconsideration of the matter' said Mr. Kidston, thinking a question put to him referred to his own action. 'I don't know anything about that' he replied when the question was put as referring to Mr. Blair.

"Mr. Blair was waited upon in regard to the matter, but preferred not to make any statement for publication at this stage.

"The position offered to Mr. Blair, it may be remarked, carries a salary of £2,000/-/- a year with the right to a pension. For instance, by the time he had reached the age of 52 years he would have been entitled to retire from the Bench with a pension of £1,000/-/- a year for the remainder of his life'. (30)

Bernays says: "There is some reason for believing that he (Blair) had been practically promised a seat on the Bench in the south, but whatever the actual facts of the case were, he appeared to think that he had been treated badly and he became a very pronounced opponent of Kidston and afterwards led what was called 'The Independent Opposition'." Again at a later date, Bernays says of Blair: "He also had ill-luck when William Kidston,
reconstructing his Ministry, promised him a southern Supreme Court judgeship and failed to keep his promise”. Then after recounting the later eminence achieved by Blair, Bernays almost rejoices, “Verily, is it not enough to make William Kidston, late of Falkirk, turn in his grave”.(31)

Blair had to wait 14 years for another opportunity to take a seat on the Supreme Court Bench.

In opposition he could have been a constant thorn in Kidston’s side. Yet he came to his rescue in October 1910 in a debate with T. J. Ryan and Edward Macartney on the subject of Supply, particularly in relation to the Auditor General’s criticisms of Government expenditure of money for the University of Queensland. On the other hand, Blair was quick to attack when he saw public money being used for fighting an industrial dispute in which the Government had no part. This was the result of Kidston’s offer to bear the cost of the Queensland Tramway Employees’ Association opposing an application for registration under the Commonwealth Arbitration Act.(32)

All through his Parliamentary career Blair had sought to look after the interests of his electorate of Ipswich. An example appears in the Press in April 1904 under the heading of “Country News” Ipswich and West Moreton: “Mr. G. N. Walker, Clerk of Petty Sessions, reports delay has occurred in sending him allotments for wives and families from the wages of the men sent from Ipswich to employment at Nambour and Gatton. On Tuesday he communicated with the Hon. J. W. Blair, M.L.A. Mr. Blair subsequently interviewed the State Treasurer with the result that this (Wednesday) morning Mr. Walker has received instructions to advance £1/-/- to each family on account. He also received the proportion of the wages of the men sent to Warwick”.(33)

Once out of the Ministry, Blair had a period of comparative quiescence, although still a private member of the Legislative Assembly. Bernays says he had a somewhat adventurous struggle at the Bar again, but the Blair eloquence and ability seem to have carried him along satisfactorily until his next return to office.(34)

Then on 19 January 1912 the hostility between the Brisbane Tramway Company and its employees who were members of the Australian Tramway Employees’ Union erupted into a strike. The members of the Federal union wanted all tramway men to join their union, but a number preferred the local union or none at all. When the Federal union members started wearing their
union badges on their uniforms, management intervened and the employees moved into strike action. This escalated, as other unions became involved, into a general strike. (35)

**BRUSH WITH THE MINERS**

The coal miners in Blair's electorate were amongst the last of the strikers to return to work, although by mid-February 1912 the general strike had commenced to lose its momentum and to show signs of fizzing out, which in fact it did by the end of February. On 24 February 1912 Blair addressed a large number of miners at Silkstone, in his electorate. He had to cope with interjectors (some 30 to 40 of them) but in the end he won out and urged his audience to return to work. J. S. Collings, a union official, tried to stem the tide of Blair's eloquence. Blair heard him out and then "dealt with him effectively" (36). Despite his efforts the miners failed to return to work.

Then came an event, unheralded and apparently passed over by the Press. Blair at the age of 40 on 29 February 1912 married May Christina Gibson, aged 21 years, and 19 years his junior. The marriage certificate gives the occupation of the bridegroom as Barrister at law, but no entry under this heading appears for the bride. The marriage was celebrated at St. Andrew's Church of England, South Brisbane. The church marriage register is likewise silent about the bride's occupation (37). Frank Hardy was not so reticent in his thinly veiled reference to Blair as the trial judge in what Hardy calls the Mulgara case. He says "The judge, a fat jovial whisky-drinking fellow who had married a barmaid . . . . didn't take life or justice very seriously . . . ." (38)

The hearsay supports Hardy, but the official records do not. Therefore it is not for me to pass judgment on the marriage, but I feel it is necessary to mention it because of the social implications in 1912 of such a marriage.

The first public reference to Blair's marriage appears shortly after the event when he reached another watershed in his life.

After the general strike was called off officially on 5 March 1912, Denham, the Premier, Kidston's successor since the latter's resignation in February 1911, called an election for 27 April 1912. (39)

As soon as the election had been announced Blair was approached on 9 March 1912 by citizens of Ipswich with a requisition containing nearly 1000 signatures, to allow himself to be nominated as the Government candidate for Ipswich. A representative gathering of citizens visited Blair at his residence
to present the requisition to him. A Mr. F. E. Barbat supported by Messrs. H. T. Hooper and H. S. Cubb told him Ipswich wanted to be represented by a man who would help place Queensland where she was some weeks before the general strike. A Mr. E. J. Easton told him that he represented many who had always voted for labour (sic), but who had decided to vote for Mr. Blair; he eulogised Blair's actions during the late strike. Alderman A. T. Stephenson, the Mayor of Ipswich, said he had always been politically opposed to Blair but now asked him to accede to the citizens' request. A Mr. O'Sullivan said he had always been a labour (sic) supporter but Blair's recent courageous actions had changed his views. Mr. A. E. Roberts junior said a number of Labour (sic) supporters had asked him to get the requisition form so they could sign it.

Blair thanked them for the honour of the requisition and accepted nomination as a Government candidate. He also thanked those present for their kind wishes for his wife (the first reference at all to her in the Brisbane Courier). He said she had more to do with his re-entering politics than he himself. When he first came out it was as an independent, having signed no platform nor had he signed any since. He referred to the late industrial trouble which had contributed to his re-entering politics. He looked on the fight in Ipswich as a momentous one, if not the most momentous in Queensland, and if he acceded to their request he would have a hard fight and one in which he would need all their best efforts to secure his return.

A Mr. Parlane said Mr. Denham was a democrat and he thought Mr. Blair was doing the right thing in coming out as his supporter. In the late strike the labour (sic) party had made a wrong move and although not a sanguine man Parlane thought "the coming elections would act on the labour party in the same way as the South Australian elections had done towards them". Blair's electoral committee was then formed with Mr. Parlane as chairman.

The Brisbane Courier commented: "General satisfaction has been expressed on all sides at Mr. Blair's decision to contest the Ipswich election in the Government interest and his prospects of success are very bright. Not only will he get a solid Liberal vote but a large number of his own following, to say nothing of those who until the late strike have always voted labour but have now thrown off the Trades Hall yoke". (40)
The tenor of the Brisbane Courier report is that Blair had contemplated not contesting the 1912 election, but the wishes of a number of people, including his wife and the requisitionists, had led him not only to stand again but as an aligned candidate. So began his final act on the political stage. In the revulsion against the general strike the Labour Party ended up at the election on 27 April 1912 with 24 seats as against the Liberals' 47 seats, the remaining seat being held by an independent. (41)

A POLITICAL TWILIGHT

As a Government member it was not long before Blair was called into the Ministry. On 3 September 1912 he was given the portfolio of Public Instruction; new ground for him. He held this office until 1 June 1915 when, having lost his seat, he never re-entered the Parliament.

During his swan song as a legislator he was responsible for the bringing down and passage of further social legislation. The Criminal Code in 1913 was amended to raise the age of consent from 14 to 17 years and made other elaborate provision for the protection of young girls. "The Testators Family Maintenance Act", which gave the Court discretion to remedy unjust cases of disinherittance of wife, husband or children, although it allowed interference with testamentary dispositions, was passed in 1914. The Friendly Societies Act was also amended in 1914 to allow societies to own their own dispensaries; the only corporate ownership of pharmacies allowed in Queensland. He was responsible also for a consolidation of the laws relating to technical instruction. (42)

He succeeded in having the State system of scholarships placed upon a qualifying instead of a competitive basis. He also introduced the system of extension scholarships (a further two years grant) for existing State scholarship holders who qualified in the Junior Public Examination. (43)

By the end of 1912 Denham's grip on the Liberal party was beginning to weaken and conflicts within that party began to emerge. In contrast Labor, with T. J. Ryan and E. G. Theodore as leader and deputy leader respectively, was firmly controlled and firmly intent on winning the 1915 election. The division between country and town Liberal was more open and evident and Ryan was to exploit this.

By the end of 1913 the Liberal organisation was declining seriously in efficiency. Denham's continuing lack of definitiveness as a leader was highlighted by his method of selecting an
acting premier during his absence overseas in 1914. Previously when the Premier had been absent he had appointed Barlow from the Legislative Council. On this occasion, after pondering for a month, Denham finally decided on a most unusual course of action. Blair and W. H. Barnes were supposed to be competing for the temporary leadership. The fact of there being any competition at all was accepted at the time as evidence that misunderstandings of one sort or another had crept into the party. Denham instead of appointing his own locum tenens adopted the strange expedient of taking a secret ballot to allow Government members to choose between Barnes and Blair, with the Clerk of Parliament acting as returning officer. Although the profoundest secrecy was observed, it is now known that Barnes headed the poll by a substantial majority, that J. W. Blair came next and that there was one other member of the Ministry for whom one vote was cast. Governor MacGregor drily commented to the Colonial Secretary in a despatch: "The action of Mr. Denham in leaving the selection of his locum tenens to a ballot of the members of his party . . . has not proved conducive to harmony among the Ministers themselves, nor has it given satisfaction to the Liberal Party generally. There is latent feeling of discontent in the Cabinet and beyond it". (44)

In 1915 two Ministers, Appel and Paget, resigned from the Cabinet before the general election, while Blair declined Denham's endorsement and stood as an independent. The general election of 22 May 1915 was a debacle for the Liberal Party. Its absolute majority of 22 turned into an absolute deficit of 18 in favour of the Labor Party. Denham himself lost the Oxley seat to Labor. Blair went down by 400 votes to D. A. Gledson (a Labor newcomer). It was in the mining areas of Blair's electorate that the vote went most against him. The miners had been one of the most intransigent elements in the 1912 strike; they appeared to still resent Blair's challenge, at the time, that they should return to work. (45)

Blair never again graced the Legislative Assembly. Once again he concentrated on building up a full-time practice at the Queensland Bar. His ability was recognised by T. J. Ryan, the Labor Premier and himself a jurist of no mean ability, with whom Blair and H. D. Macrossan (another barrister) had clashed strongly in the Assembly on legal points arising out of speeches by Ryan on the Industrial Peace Bill in 1912. By 1917 Blair was appearing with Ryan for the Government in the Legislative Referendum case, arguing the validity of the Constitutional
legislation Blair had brought down in 1908. The Queensland Full Court declared the Constitution Act Amendment Act of 1908 and the Parliamentary Bills Referendum Act of 1908 were both invalid. The High Court of Australia unanimously reversed this decision and declared that there was power to abolish the Legislative Council of Queensland by an Act passed in accordance with the Parliamentary Bills Referendum Act(46). Blair's services as counsel in criminal cases continued to be in great demand. Apparently his effect upon the tear ducts of jurors remained unimpaired.

THE BENCH AT LAST

Then, in the sweeping changes in personnel on the Supreme Court bench occasioned by the Judges Retirement Act of 1921, which brought about the compulsory retirement of judges at 70 and abolished pensions for subsequent appointees, Blair arrived at the final watershed of his life. This time he took the Northern Judge ship when it was offered to him by the Labor Premier E. G. Theodore with effect on and from 1 April 1922.(47)

From then on moves occurred swiftly. On 24 January 1923 he became Central Judge, based at Rockhampton. Thomas William McCawley, Blair's private secretary in his earlier Ministerial days, who had had a meteoric career to Crown Solicitor in 1910 and thence on 12 October 1917 to President of the State Industrial Arbitration Court with the status of a Supreme Court Judge, followed on 1 April 1922 by the Chief Justiceship, died prematurely on 15 April 1925. Blair was offered and accepted the post of Chief Justice to which he was sworn in on 24 April 1925. He arrived from Rockhampton by train that day accompanied by Mrs. Blair and his associate Mr. Duncan Peirson (who was formerly a member of the Daily Mail literary staff). Peirson was to remain Blair's associate until the Judge's retirement in 1940. Mr. Justice Macnaughton swore in the new Chief Justice, Mr. W. F. Webb (Solicitor-General) as a Central Judge and Mr. F. W. Dickson (Crown Prosecutor) as an acting Judge of the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice then swore in Mr. Justice Webb as President of the Arbitration Court.(48)

Blair had been a member of the Senate of the University of Queensland in 1915-16. He was re-appointed in 1926, and in 1927 he became Chancellor and held this post until his death(49). During his Chancellorship the St. Lucia project was undertaken by the Government when the removal of the University from the cramped quarters in old Government House at the Botanic Gardens end of George Street in the city to the Brisbane suburb of St.
Lucia finally got off the drawing board and commenced to become a reality. World War II prevented the completion of the move before Blair’s death in 1944.

In the late Judicial years: Sir James wearing the Chief Justice’s teased wig, and insignia of a K.C.M.G. – Courier-Mail Library.
When the Legislative Council was abolished in 1922 the President, William Lennon, lost his position. E. G. Theodore created a salary for the office of Lieutenant Governor of £1,000 ($2,000) per annum. For seven years Lennon drew this salary. When the Moore Government came to power in May 1929 the salary was abolished and as the year drew to a close the Hon. William Lennon resigned the post. Blair, as Chief Justice, was appointed Lieutenant-Governor in his place, without salary. (50)

On 1 January 1930 Blair was created a Knight Bachelor on the recommendation of the Moore Government which had brought Queensland back within the Imperial Honours system, so repugnant to Labor Governments (51). Nevertheless, in the King George V Silver Jubilee year of 1935, on 3 June Blair was awarded a K.C.M.G. Less than a month before, the Forgan Smith Labor Government had recorded a massive electoral win of 45 seats to 27, on 11 May 1935. Premier Forgan Smith had informed the Governor, Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, that no-one was recommended for honours by his Government. Blair was not in the Commonwealth Honours list. The only conclusion to be drawn is that Blair as Lieutenant Governor could receive an honour from the Sovereign. The award was not dependent upon the advice of any Ministers but directly in the gift of the Crown to its representative. (52)

Whilst Blair presided over a number of notable trials, there are two which deserve special mention. One was the Mungana case which began on 22 July 1931 where the Crown alleged conspiracy against W. McCormack, E. G. Theodore, P. L. Goddard and F. Reid in selling to the Government of Queensland for £40,000/-/- ($80,000) a mine which was worth only £10,000/-/- ($20,000). The claim was for damages to the extent of the difference between the price paid and the alleged true value. The special jury of four, after a very lengthy summing up by Blair, found all defendants were blameless on 24 August 1931 and judgment was entered for them accordingly (53). This cause celebre drew much comment. It is perhaps well summarised by a contemporary quatrain from the pen of a young Presbyterian clergyman (Rev. Richard Barden) which was given to me by the Rev. Robert Park, O.B.E., of Brisbane:

"Lives of statesmen all remind us
We should keep our palms quite dry
And departing leave behind us
Nothing for the Courts to try".
Under the guise of fiction, but thinly veiled, an accusation of venality was made against Blair in Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* — over his part in the Mungana trial. John West gives the Mulgara case trial Judge "a bulging envelope" as a "private presentation to you of £3,000/-/- ($6,000) in recognition of the public-spirited manner in which you have carried out your duties since your appointment to the Bench". (54)

The other trial which was also a *cause celebre* arose out of the raid on Parliament House, Brisbane, on 4 August 1939 by 37 men representing themselves as members of the League for Social Justice, who broke in on a Labor Caucus meeting in the old Legislative Council Chamber. The men were armed with batons, coils of barbed wire and hammers. The fearless demeanour of Forgan Smith held them in check whilst the police were summoned, and on their arrival all the intruders were arrested. They were committed for trial in the Supreme Court on the charge of assembly in such a manner as to cause fear that they would tumultuously disturb the peace. With so many defendants, there was no court room big enough to provide a venue for the trial. As a result the trial had to be conducted in the Brisbane City Hall on 10 October 1939 before the Chief Justice and jury of 12. Blair summed up fairly, but nevertheless seemed assured of the guilt of the accused. Astonishingly, the jury found all accused not guilty and they had to be discharged. (55)

On Thursday 16 May 1940 Blair retired from the Bench. In his farewell address he said: "This morning I hear my voice from the Bench for the last time — it is a strange position. The inevitability of time is pressing its irresistible claim to finality, and yet I relinquish my office without complaint or regrets. I have loved the position and have endeavoured to discharge my duty in consonance with the eternal and immutable interests of truth and justice. I can sincerely say that I am not conscious of ever having willingly done any harm to anyone, so this farewell from Bench and Bar will ever be an abiding and fragrant memory". (56)

On the face of it all he still had a year to run before he reached the compulsory retiring age for judges. So despite all the official evidence to the contrary, one cannot help wondering about the actual year of his birth.

His successor as Chief Justice was the waspish H. D. Macrossan (Senior Puisne Judge) who died, however, on 23 June 1940 less than six weeks after taking the position. Mr. Justice W.
F. Webb was appointed to replace Macrossan on 1 June 1940\(^{(57)}\). Thus Queensland had no less than three Chief Justices in office in a time span of 47 days.

**AN EMINENT CAREER**

Blair remained in office as Chancellor of the University of Queensland and retained the Lieutenant Governorship.

Because of the Judges’ Retirement Act of 1921 he retired without pension. Forgan Smith saw fit to restore a salary to the Lieutenant Governor of £650/-/- ($1300) per annum. This sum was budgeted for each year during the balance of Blair’s lifetime in miscellaneous expenditure allocated to the Department of the Premier and Chief Secretary.\(^{(58)}\)

As previously stated, Blair died on 18 November 1944. His public career had been outstandingly successful. He had held high public office in various spheres from the age of 32 onwards.

As a man he seemed to have enjoyed at most the affection and respect of his contemporaries. He found time for many varied activities during his busy public and professional life. He was vice-president in 1911 and then president of the Ipswich Grammar School Old Boys’ Association in 1912 and 1913, the latter being the school’s golden jubilee year. When a Brisbane branch of the Old Boys’ Association was formed in 1932 he accepted the office of joint patron with Mr. R. A. Kerr, the then headmaster.

He was president of the Queensland Scottish Union 1909-1914, and belonged to and held office in the Queensland Irish Association. His Scottish father and Irish mother appear to have made it possible for him to follow this normally incompatible course. An athlete of some note in his school days and young manhood, he later was president of the Queensland Rugby Union. He became a member of the Queensland Club in 1902 and also had membership of the Johnsonian, Tattersalls and Queensland Turf Clubs.\(^{(59)}\)

Like all public men he had his detractors — they held he was venal, he was weak, he contracted a mesalliance because of that weakness and he lacked dignity. On the other hand it was said of him that he had outstanding intellectual gifts which took him, “a native son” of poor but respectable parentage, to some of the highest offices in the State. J. D. Story, I.S.O., the Vice-Chancellor of the University eulogised Blair as an admirable Chancellor: “At University ceremonials he was a colourful personality; his resonant voice and gift of ready and apt speech always held the close attention of his listeners. He had great sympathy with youth, and
his popularity with students never waned. He rendered his greatest service to youth when as Education Minister he succeeded in having the State system of scholarships to secondary schools placed upon a qualifying instead of a competitive basis. By that action he helped many thousands of young Queenslanders". (60)

A *Courier-Mail* editorial characterised him as a man of great humanity with real kindness of heart and a genuine interest in his fellowmen. Despite his intellectual gifts and erudition he easily made friends without condescension or lack of dignity. In speech and manner he preserved graciousness and courtesy, and his ready wit never carried malice. He tempered justice with mercy — the law never dried up his human sympathies. Likewise he escaped the rancour and cynicism of politics. "There have been stronger characters on the Bench, but thousands will mourn and long cherish the memory of a lovable man". (61)

He was given a State funeral on 20 November 1944. After a service at St. John's Cathedral, Brisbane, his remains were interred at the suburban Bulimba Cemetery. His widow survived him, but there were no children of the marriage. (62)

Yet, I feel I should not conclude without mentioning that Blair's sister Mrs. Isabella Dunn Stanley had a son, Edwin James Droughton Stanley who followed also the profession of the law and, a graduate of the University of Queensland (B.A., 1916), was a member of its Senate from 1923 to 1950. After a distinguished career at the Bar, Mr. Justice Stanley was appointed to the Supreme Court Bench on 6 February 1947 from which he retired on 30 October 1964. (63)

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