1951-1952.

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CASES DETERMINED IN THE

HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA

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JUSTICES OF THE HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA.

DURING THE CURRENCY OF THIS VOLUME

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR JOHN GREIG LATHAM, P.C., G.C.M.G., CHIEF JUSTICE.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR OWEN DIXON, P.C., K.C.M.G., CHIEF JUSTICE.

THE HONOURABLE SIR EDWARD ALOYSIUS McTiernan, K.B.E.

THE HONOURABLE DUDLEY WILLIAMS.

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THE HONOURABLE FRANK WALTERS KITTO.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL:

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE JOHN ARMSTRONG SPICER, Q.C.

Our late Sovereign King George the Sixth died at Sandringham House, in the fifty-seventh year of his age and the sixteenth year of his reign, on 6th February, 1952. Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth was thereupon proclaimed Queen by the title of Elizabeth the Second.

MEMORANDA

1952

April 7.—Resignation of The RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR JOHN GREIG LATHAM, P.C., G.C.M.G., of the office of Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, accepted.

April 18.—Appointment of the Right Honourable Sir Owen DIXON, P.C., K.C.M.G., to the office of Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia.



RETIREMENT OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE.

On Monday, 7th April, 1952, in order to mark the retirement of the Right Honourable Sir John Greig Latham, P.C., G.C.M.G., as Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, farewell addresses were delivered in the High Court in Melbourne by Mr. J. B. Tait, Q.C., on behalf of the Bar in Victoria, by Mr. R. N. Vroland, on behalf of the Law Council of Australia, and by Mr. A. Warrington Rogers, on behalf of the Law Institute of Victoria.

In his reply, SIR JOHN said:

"Mr. Tait, Mr. Vroland and Mr. Warrington Rogers, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you indeed for the most generous things that you have said about me. No one in my position could be otherwise than moved by the tributes which have been paid to me on behalf of the Bar, of which I have been a member since 1905, and of which I am still a member. During that period I was secretary of the Committee of Counsel, I was closely associated with the inauguration of the Law Council and also had many associations with the Law Institute representing the solicitors. I did two years articles in a solicitor's office before reading for the Bar. That is one reason why as a judge I was better than might have been expected, and that may or may not be a tribute to myself. The relation of the Bar and of the Bench to solicitors is very important indeed. My relations have always been very happy. After sixteen years of service on the Bench in a position of prominence and leadership I appreciate the tributes which I have received from the profession.

The Bar in particular, the solicitors to a large extent, and the judges entirely, work in public and are subject to the criticism

of the public and the fellow members of their profession.

I accepted this position with a sense of fear and trembling when I thought of those whom I was to have the duty of succeeding.

I have found my work interesting, responsible, and not easy. The difficulty was to do your best, and to be satisfied that you had done your best. Throughout my period of office as a judge, I have always felt that I have had the support, the help, and the assistance of a strong legal profession.

A judge would be entirely insensitive to the nature of his duties if he did not realise the importance of a strong Bar, educated, learned, and independent. During my tenure of office I have always sought to secure that every argument had a fair hearing.

It has sometimes been difficult to hear repetition of argument when the same proposition has been advanced six times. Perhaps there is room for suggesting that arguments have become over lengthy. There have been occasions when I have quite fully understood the proposition at its third statement, and when it was quite unnecessary to state it six times, but I hope I have not been impatient on the Bench, because one of the first requisites of a judge is to hear argument fairly, and that means fully, but not over-fully.

I have suffered during my occupation of office from the defect that I always wanted to understand the argument that has been put, and I had a principle that all argument should be intelligible. That is sometimes, a difficult standard to attain and I had to apply it in the subjective sense that the term intelligible meant intelligible to me. I hope I have not been unduly insistent in requiring counsel to say exactly what it was they were arguing, or endeavouring to argue.

I have been, during the past year, engaged in framing new rules of court. Among these rules are provisions for the submission of argument upon appeals in written form. It will not be compulsory to adopt that practice, but it is thought by the judges of the court that if such a practice is established, and wisely used, it will help towards clarity of argument and will save both Bench and Bar a great deal of time.

Of course it will have the disadvantage to which I have already referred, that counsel will find themselves under the necessity of stating their arguments in a clear and reasoned form, but that, after all, is an objection which can only be maintained privately, and not uttered in public.

The High Court is a general court of appeal, and our work has been most varied, reaching into every department of the law. Most attention is paid to the court by the public in relation to constitutional cases. The position of the court in a federal system such as ours is a position of great and highly significant importance but the constitutional work of the court has been only a fraction of its work.

The Constitution has now been in operation for fifty years. On the whole the Constitution has worked well, but I venture to suggest on this occasion that the time has arrived for a review of the Constitution in relation to some matters which stand out, from the legal point of view, as well as from the political point of view—though the court is concerned only with the legal aspect of those problems.

The Constitution, I suggest, might be reconsidered with advantage. One of the difficulties of improving the Constitution is that a proposal is always made by one political party, and is sometimes objected to just because it has been made by that party. I suggest that it is

not too much to hope for that some reconsideration of the Constitution may be conducted upon a non-party basis.

Among the matters which I suggest might engage the attention of those who have the knowledge, capacity, and interest to consider

these problems are—

In the first place there is the power with respect to inter-State trade. The distinction between inter-State and intra-State trade appeared more real in 1900 or 1901 than it does today. The distinction is largely a distinction upon paper, and not in fact. The distribution of Federal and State powers in relation to this large subject matter is a matter which really calls for inquiry.

Connected with the subject of trade is s. 92. When I die, s. 92 will be found written on my heart. It is quite time that some consideration was given to the possibility of doing something about s. 92. When I say doing something, I mean doing something other than submitting to a series of judgments and endeavouring to work out a proposition which will be consistent with all of them. A new approach is required to s. 92, and no approach has been made towards reconsideration of that provision. Any proposals for reconsideration of s. 92 will inevitably involve great differences of opinion, but even if they trench upon grave political differences, some attempt might be made to make the words a little clearer.

Then there is the question of the financial relations of the Commonwealth and the States. This evidently requires further consideration; whatever the legal position may be, it is quite plain that if a federal system is to continue there must be a recon-

sideration of the present position.

The industrial power of the Commonwealth, s. 51 (xxxv.), with which I have had so much to do, in Parliament and on the Bench, is such that I am almost ashamed to refer to it. That provision is legalistic in the extreme. It affects the most important element in modern life, involving the determination not only of political but also of economic questions by some form of public authority.

There is a great deal of unnecessary formalism resulting from the present power relating to disputes, extension of disputes, and the like, which might well be saved to industry and the community if amendments were made in this part of the Constitution, even without running into highly controversial partisan questions.

I also think that if some wise and experienced person could define excise duty it would be a real help to all the Parliaments of Australia.

Finally let me mention the corporation power. The corporation power might be very useful but it is so obscure that no Parliament is prepared to do very much in running the risk of attempting to legislate under it.

These are matters which impress one who has had experience of the Constitution in many capacities, but more particularly as a judge.

I have only one other observation to make. It is this. Not all cases are decided unanimously in the High Court, or in any other court of appeal. There is sometimes criticism of one or other court, in relation to division of opinion. Let met say two things about that.

In the first place the provisions for appeal in themselves admit, strange as it may appear, the possibility of judicial fallibility. No one who believes in any system of appeal can complain of divergence of judicial opinion as such. Secondly, every day hundreds of thousands of legal transactions take place; possibly millions of transactions have legal significance. In most of these the law is perfectly clear and no difficulty arises.

In a very small proportion of the cases there is room for difference of opinion and disputes, and they may go to the Justices' Court, to the County Court, to the Supreme Court, or to the High Court.

When a case reaches the High Court, as a rule it is because there are either great interests involved, or there is some genuine difficulty in law as to which there are arguments available on both sides.

The point I desire to make is that on the whole it is the difficult cases, the doubtful cases only, which reach a tribunal such as this, and they are a very small fraction of the cases which might arise. They represent really only an infinitesimal proportion of the legal transactions that take place.

I hope, therefore, that the profession will not be led into doubts as to the value and validity of the law by academic discussions of marginal cases. Naturally those who write on legal subjects are interested in the marginalia of the law, but I ask you to remember that the law as a whole works very well indeed, and that you should not judge the certainty of the law upon divisions of opinion in the final court of appeal upon a matter which has been through other tribunals.

I leave the High Court feeling confident that the courts of Australia have the confidence of the people. That is due to the character of the judges, and the essential and intimate connection between the courts and a strong and independent legal profession. I look forward to the courts and the profession continuing their vitally important service to the people of Australia, and to the maintenance and improvement of the high standard which has hitherto obtained.

I am glad to go into retirement feeling that I have the goodwill of so many friends."

SWEARING IN OF SIR OWEN DIXON AS CHIEF JUSTICE.

On Monday, 21st April, 1952, in the High Court in Sydney the Right Honourable Sir Owen Dixon, P.C., K.C.M.G., took the oaths of office as Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. Addresses of congratulation were delivered by Senator J. A. Spicer, Q.C., Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, by the Honourable C. E. Martin, Q.C., Attorney-General of the State of New South Wales, and by Mr. R. de Ferranti, on behalf of the Incorporated Law Institute of New South Wales.

In his reply, SIR OWEN said:

"Mr. Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, Mr. Attorney-General of New South Wales, Mr. de Ferranti, gentlemen of the Bar, gentlemen practising as solicitors: I am, and of course it is needless to say, deeply moved by the very generous and over-kind statements you have made about my judicial work. It is only too true that I came to the Bar a long time ago and I came to the Bench a long time ago. I have spent a little under nineteen years at the Bar and I have spent a little over twenty-three years on the Bench.

I think it is hardly useful to refer to the past except to explain the present. But my work at the Bar covered a period when I was younger and when perhaps according to the ordinary nature of man he derives greater pleasure and excitement from his activities. The activities at the Bar are greater than those on the Bench, and the responsibilities are no less. The Bar has traditionally been, over the centuries, one of the four original learned professions. It occupied that position in tradition because it formed part of the use and the service of the Crown in the administration of justice. But because it is the duty of the barrister to stand between the subject and the Crown, and between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, it is necessary that, while the Bar occupies an essential part in the administration of justice, the barrister should be completely independent and work entirely as an individual, drawing on his own resources of learning, ability and intelligence, and owing allegiance to none.

The work of solicitors in the administration of justice has the greatest possible importance, but their allegiance is perhaps more to their clients who have a more permanent or at all events a longer relation with them than the transitory relations between client and

counsel when the full enthusiasms and force of the advocate are attached to the individual for a short space of time.

I would like to say that from long experience on the Bench and a not much shorter experience at the Bar there is no more important contribution to the doing of justice than the elucidation of the facts and the ascertainment of what a case is really about, which is done before it comes to counsel's hands. Counsel, who brings his learning, ability, character and firmness of mind to the conduct of causes and maintains the very high tradition of honour and independence of English advocacy, in my opinion makes a greater contribution to justice than the judge himself.

In the course of the last twelve months I have presided in this Court as what may be called a de facto. I wish to say how much support, encouragement and co-operation I have received from my colleagues in that position, and to give them my thanks for their ever-ready loyal help and assistance.

The court is a co-operative institution; the position of the man who presides differs very little from that of any other judge. Perhaps he receives a little more attention from the Bar than he deserves because he announces the conclusions of the court first, but all my judicial experience tells me that a man's influence on the court does not depend on where he sits.

I have had the privilege of knowing all the Chief Justices of this Court. Before Sir Samuel Griffith I appeared not infrequently. I knew him but slightly privately. The other Chief Justices I have known both as men and as judges. To those who turn their minds to the past and think of Sir Samuel Griffith, Sir Adrian Knox, Sir Isaac Isaacs, Sir Frank Gavan Duffy and Sir John Latham, it will be easy to understand that I come to take their seat with a great feeling of humility. Their abilities were various but all very striking, and all of them in some association or other with myself impressed their personality upon me. But when one man goes another must take his place, and it is of little use for the man who succeeds to consider his inadequacy to take the post of those who have preceded him. His duty is to do his best.

SIR ADRIAN KNOX took his seat in Melbourne in 1919, and I was present when he took the oath of office and spoke as I am doing now. In the course of his remarks, as I remember very well, he said that he had been very much struck by receiving from Sir William Cullen a telegram which addressed him as The Chief Justice of Australia, a title to be distinguished from that of Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, and he remarked that such an address would have been impossible fifteen years before.

Today I am highly flattered with the compliment the Chief Justice of New South Wales has paid me by being present when I take the oath of office. Since Adrian Knox spoke in that manner further time has passed, and I think it has become apparent to a larger number of people, and to all the judges of the Commonwealth, that the judicial system of the Commonwealth is an integral whole and that the High Court stands merely as the final appellate tribunal in Australia in that coherent and established system which is recognised as a unit in judicial administration.

Mr. Justice Owen reinforces the compliment which the Chief Justice has paid me by being present, and I have the happiness to have with me once more Sir George Rich, who for so long, during I should think the greater part of my life as an advocate and as a judge, has given by example, a lesson in the place that humanity, urbanity and wit may take in a court of ultimate appeal. I am

very grateful for his presence.

But the Chief Justice of New South Wales has not merely paid

me a personal compliment, he has paid it to the court.

In saying that this represents simply the appellate tribunal and the tribunal for Federal questions in the judicial system of the Commonwealth, I do not overlook the distinction which we unfortunately maintain between State and Federal jurisdiction. That is an eighteenth century conception which we derived from the United States of America in the faithful copy which was made of their judicial institutions. It is to be hoped that at some future time it will be recognised that under the English system of law, the British system of law which we inherited, the whole body of law is antecedent to the work of any Legislature and that the courts as a whole must interpret and apply the whole body of law, so that there should be one judicial system in Australia which is neither State nor Commonwealth but a system of Australian Courts administering the total body of the law.

The High Court's jurisdiction is divided in its exercise between constitutional and federal cases which loom so largely in the public eye, and the great body of litigation between man and man, or even man and government, which has nothing to do with the Constitution, and which is the principal preoccupation of the court. Federalism means a demarcation of powers and this casts upon the court a responsibility of deciding whether legislation is within the boundaries of allotted powers. Unfortunately that responsibility is very widely misunderstood, misunderstood, largely by the popular use and misuse of terms which are not applicable, and it is not sufficiently recognised that the court's sole function is to interpret

a constitutional description of power or restraint upon power and say whether a given measure falls on one side of a line consequently drawn or on the other, and that it has nothing whatever to do with the merits or demerits of the measure.

Such a function has led us all I think to believe that close adherence to legal reasoning is the only way to maintain the confidence of all parties in Federal conflicts. It may be that the court is thought to be excessively legalistic. I should be sorry to think that it is anything else. There is no other safe guide to judicial decisions in great conflicts than a strict and complete legalism.

The nature of the court's methods is somewhat different from those which are habitually followed in England, particularly by the court of appeal. We are accustomed, as all know, more often than not to reserve our judgment and to consider the case and to deliver a written judgment. In England, with the pressure of business of modern times, that is rather the exception than the rule in the court of appeal.

I wish to take this opportunity of pointing out the great difference which the two methods necessarily involve from the point of view of the advocate and the judge. From the point of view of the advocate, where the usual course is to reserve judgment, he is conducting an argument which is to be recorded by the judge or judges and is to be considered and investigated and compared with that of his adversary. If judgment is to be delivered immediately judges must necessarily adopt a critical and not sympathetic approach to arguments and must sift them and decide as they proceed from the mouth of counsel whether they have validity or not, and what is their validity.

The methods of the court have greatly changed during the period with which I have been connected with it. When I first began to practise before it its methods were entirely dialectical, the minds of all the judges were actively expressed in support or in criticism of arguments. Cross-examination of counsel was indulged in as part of the common course of argument. For myself, that system was advantageous. Apparently I was endowed with a greater degree of endurance or lack of sensibility than most people, but whether because those of greater nervous endurance or physical capacity were not so often to be met with as perhaps they may now be, or for other reasons, there was a large body of counsel who disliked that procedure, and when I came to the Bench I had formed a conviction that it was not a desirable one. I felt that the process by which arguments were torn to shreds before they were fully admitted to the mind led to a lack of coherence in the presentation of a

case and to a failure of the Bench to understand the complete and full cases of the parties, and I therefore resolved, so far as I was able to restrain my impetuosity, that I should not follow that method and I should dissuade others from it.

In the course of years I think the temper of the court has entirely changed, but it probably has developed opposite defects. The method which it now follows has a tendency perhaps to produce a little indecision, which may only be a postponement of judgment; a greater burden is thrown upon the judges, and there is, as an inevitable consequence, a tendency to work out new and possibly unexplored solutions of cases after the argument has finished. However, the other method has its advantages and that which we now pursue at all events appears to me to be best. But it is perhaps desirable to say that the method which we now pursue places an added responsibility upon solicitors because when a case comes here and is subjected to that method of inquiry or investigation it is very essential that all the facts should be available and the court should not be led into error by a partial, inadequate and incomplete picture of what actually happened between the parties.

The court and the legal profession stand as the necessary foundation of any community. Indeed it may be said that the courts and the system of law are both the foundation and the steel framework, but neither a foundation nor a steel framework is ever able to do more than support a structure with stability and at rest.

Lawyers are often criticised because their work is not constructive. It is not their business to contribute to the constructive activities of the community, but to keep the foundations and framework steady. Those who believe in a planned society should perceive that the rule of law administered by the courts offers a reconciliation of ordered liberty with planned control. Those who, on the contrary, believe that society is best served by giving rein to the competitive exertion of the energies of everyone in his calling or pursuit must also see that the courts must preserve the rights of each from the encroachment of the others. Between those two views there are gradations in which the court must serve the like function.

The authority of the courts of law administering justice according to law is a product of British tradition and it is for us to maintain it. There is I believe a general respect for the Queen's courts of justice which administer justice according to law, and I believe that there is a trust in them. But it is because they administer justice according to law.

It is important to maintain the prestige of the legal profession and it is important to maintain the status of the judiciary. The

status of the judiciary is perhaps first and foremost the responsibility of the judges themselves. The respect for the courts must depend upon the wisdom and discretion, the learning and ability, the dignity and restraint which the judges exhibit. But there are other factors which are not within the control of the judges. We are not accustomed in Australia to administer justice in the stately edifices of other countries. We are not accustomed to accord judges the same high precedence as they are accorded in other countries.

There is in Australia a large number of jurisdictions and a confusion in the public mind as to the functions the jurisdictions possess. The character of the functions is misunderstood and the public do not maintain the distinction between the administration of justice according to law and the very important functions of industrial tribunals.

I have devoted the greater part of my life to the study and practice of the law. I come to this responsible office with an undiminished belief in the fundamental importance of the courts of justice in sustaining the whole edifice of society, and all I can say in conclusion is that I will do my best to maintain and protect their reputation and status.

Gentlemen of the Bar, gentlemen of the solicitors' profession, Mr. Attorney-General of the Commonwealth and Mr. Attorney-General of the State, I thank you deeply." The mode of citation of this volume of the Commonwealth Law Reports will be as follows:—

85 C.L.R.

A TABLE

OF THE

NAMES OF THE CASES REPORTED

IN THIS VOLUME.

A .	F.
Alford v. Magee 437 Attorney-General for New South Wales v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.) 237	Fern Tree Gully, Shire of; Salvation Army (Victoria) Property Trust v 159 Foster: R. v.; Ex p. Commonwealth Life (Amalgamated) Assurances Ltd 138
В.	K.
Birdsall Brothers Pty. Ltd. v. State of New South Wales - 488 Brazell, Garlick and Coy, Ex p.; R. v. Wilkinson 467 Broken Hill Theatres Pty. Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxa-	Kelly; R. v.; Ex p. Waterside Workers Federation of Australia 601 L.
tion 423	Leslie; Stanwell Park Hotel Co. Ltd. v 189
C.	London; Commissioner for Railways (N.S.W.) v 95 Luxton v. Vines 352
Cavallari v. Premier Refrigeration Co. Pty. Ltd 20 Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney Ltd.; Richardson v 110 Commonwealth Life (Amalgamated) Assurances Ltd., Ex p.; R. v. Foster 138 Commonwealth; Nelungaloo Pty. Ltd. v 545	M. McTavish; Queensland Newspapers Pty. Ltd. v 30 Magee; Alford v 437

N.	S.
Nelungaloo Pty. Ltd v. Commonwealth 545 New South Wales, State of; Birdsall Brothers Pty. Ltd. v 488 O. Oakes v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties of New South Wales 386	Salvation Army (Victoria) Property Trust v. Shire of Fern Tree Gully 159 Shaw v. The Queen 365 Shepperd v. Council of the Municipality of Ryde 1 Stamp Duties, Commissioner of (N.S.W.); Oakes v 386 Stanwell Park Hotel Co. Ltd. v. Leslie 189
P .	T.
Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.); Attorney-General for New South Wales v 237 Premier Refrigeration Co. Pty. Ltd.; Cavallari v 20 Q. Queensland Newspapers Pty. Ltd. v. McTavish 30	Taxation, Federal Commissioner of; Broken Hill Theatres Pty. Ltd. v 423 v. Midland Railway Co. of Western Australia Ltd 306 Tram and Omnibus Services, Commissioner for Government v. Vickery 635 Turner v. York Motors Pty. Ltd. 55
R.	Vickery; Commissioner for Gov-
R. v. Foster; Ex p. Commonwealth Life (Amalgamated) Assurances Ltd 138 v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia	ernment Tram and Omnibus Services 635 $-$ v. Woods 336 Vines; Luxton v 352 W.
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia, Ex p.; R. v. Kelly 601 Wilcox Mofflin Ltd. v. State of New South Wales
(N.S.W.) v. London 95 Richardson v. Commercial Banking	Wilkinson; R. v.; Ex p. Brazell, Garlick and Coy 467 Woods; Vickery v 336
Co. of Sydney Ltd 110 Riddle v. Riddle 202	Woods; Vickery v 336
Ryde, Council of the Municipality	Y.
of; Shepperd v 1	York Motors Pty. Ltd.; Turner v . 55

TABLE OF CASES AFFIRMED, REVERSED, OVERRULED, APPLIED, OR JUDICIALLY COMMENTED ON IN CASES REPORTED IN THIS VOLUME

- Attorney-General v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.), (1951) 51 S.R. (N.S.W.) 109; 68 W.N. 116. Affirmed 85 C.L.R. 237.
- Attorney-General v. Worrall, (1895) 1 Q.B. 99. Discussed 85 C.L.R. 386.
- British Insulated and Helsby Cables Ltd. v. Atherton, (1926) A.C. 205. Applied 85 C.L.R. 423.
- Clark v. Commissioner for Railways, (1936) 53 W.N. (N.S.W.) 196. Discussed 85 C.L.R. 95.
- Collins v. Hunter (R. v. Foster; Ex parte Rural Bank of New South Wales; Wagner v. Gall; Collins v. Hunter), (1949) 79 C.L.R. 43. Applied 85 C.L.R. 30.
- Commonwealth v. Quince, (1944) 68 C.L.R.
- Followed 85 C.L.R. 237.
- Feoffees of Heriot's Hospital v. Gibson, (1814) 2 Dow 301 [3 E.R. 873]. Discussed 85 C.L.R. 1.
- Jones v. Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, (1917) A.C. 528. Referred 85 C.L.R. 545.
- Lake Victoria Ltd. v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties, (1949) 49 S.R. (N.S.W.) 262; 66 W.N. 119. Referred 85 C.L.R. 336.
- Midland Railway Co. of Western Australia Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation, (1950) 81 C.L.R. 384. Affirmed 85 C.L.R. 306.
- Nelson, Ex parte [No. 2], (1929) 42 C.L.R. 258. Referred 85 C.L.R. 545.
- Nelungaloo Pty. Ltd. v. Commonwealth,(1948) 75 C.L.R. 495. Referred 85 C.L.R. 545.
- Nunawading Shire v. Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria, (1921) 29 C.L.R. 98. Distinguished 85 C.L.R. 159.
- Oakes v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties, (1951) 51 S.R. (N.S.W.) 383; 68 W.N. 278. Affirmed 85 C.L.R. 386.

- Orr v. Holmes, (1948) 76 C.L.R. 632. Applied 85 C.L.R. 635.
- Queen's College v. Melbourne Corporation, (1905) V.L.R. 247. Not followed. 85 C.L.R. 159.
- Queensland Stations Pty. Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation, (1945) 70 C.L.R. Referred 85 C.L.R. 138.
- v. Frost, (1839) 4 St. Tr. (N.S.) 86;
 9 Car. & P. 129 [173 E.R. 771].
 Discussed 85 C.L.R. 365.
- Richard Evans & Co. Ltd. v. Astley, (1911) A.C. 674. Referred 85 C.L.R. 352.
- Riddle, In re, (1951) 68 W.N. (N.S.W.) 201. Reversed 85 C.L.R. 202.
- St. Aubyn v. Attorney-General, (1952) A.C. 15. Discussed 85 C.L.R. 386.
- Shepperd v. Ryde Municipal Council, (1951) 69 W.N. (N.S.W.) 49; 18 L.G.R. 98. Reversed 85 C.L.R. 1.
- Stanwell Park Hotel Co. Ltd. v. Leslie, (1951) 51 S.R. (N.S.W.) 273; 68 W.N. 267. Reversed 85 C.L.R. 189.
- State Electricity Commission of Victoria v. Gay, (1951) V.L.R. 104.
 Discussed 85 C.L.R. 437.
- Strang, In re, (1941) 41 S.R. (N.S.W.) 114; 58 W.N. 108. Disapproved 85 C.L.R. 202.
- Sun Newspapers Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation, (1938) 61 C.L.R. 337. Applied 85 C.L.R. 423.
- Taxation, Federal Commissioner of v. J. Walter Thompson (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., (1944) 69 C.L.R. 227. Referred 85 C.L.R. 138.
- Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia v. Commonwealth Steamship Owners' Associa-tion, (1920) 28 C.L.R. 209. Discussed 85 C.L.R. 601.

STATUTES JUDICIALLY CONSIDERED.

IMPERIAL.	——————————————————————————————————————
Constitution, The, s. 51 (i.). R. v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia - 601	Income Tax Assessment Act 1936-1944, s. 51 (1). Federal Commissioner of Taxa- tion v. Midland Railway Co. of Western Australia Ltd. 306
- s. 51 (xxxv.). R. v. Foster; Ex p. Commonwealth Life (Amalgamated) Assurances Ltd 138 - s. 51 (xxxv.). R. v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia - 601 - s. 51 (xxxix.). Queensland Newspapers Pty. Ltd. v. McTavish - 30 - s. 74. Nelungaloo Pty. Ltd. v. Commonwealth - 545	
	—— 1948. R. v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia - 601 —— 1949. R. v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia - 601
of New South Wales 488	NEW SOUTH WALES.
COMMONWEALTH.	Conveyancing Act 1919-1943, s. 127 (1). Turner v. York Motors Pty. Ltd 55
Bankruptcy Act 1924-1950, ss. 90, 91, 95, 96A. Richardson v. Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney Ltd 110 Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1951, s. 4. R. v. Foster; Ex p. Commonwealth Life (Amalgamated) Assurances Ltd. 138	Crown Employees Appeal Board Act 1944. Attorney-General for New South Wales v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.) 237 Government Railways Act 1912-1943, ss. 100B, 100c, 100D. Commissioner for Railways (N.S.W.) v. London 95
Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of	Hide and Leather Industries Act 1948-1949, ss. 6, 7, 8, 9. Wilcox Mofflin Ltd. v. State of New South Wales 488
Australia - 601 ———————————————————————————————————	Industrial Arbitration Act 1940-1951. Attorney-General for New South Wales v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.) 237
1904-1951, ss. 48, 49. R. v. Kelly; Ex p. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia 601	Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1948- 1949, ss. 8, 69. Turner v. York Motors Pty. Ltd 55
Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act 1946-1949, s. 6 (1). Queensland Newspapers Pty. Ltd. v. Mc Tavish 30	Local Government Act 1919-1951, ss. 4, 344 (1), 347, 348 (1), 496, 518, 518A. Shepperd v. Council of the Municipality of Ryde

Marketing of Primary Products Act 1927-1940, ss. 3, 3a, 5 (8), 11 (1), (3). R. v. Wilkinson; Ex p. Brazell, Garlick and Coy - 467	Theatres and Public Halls Act 1908-1946, s. 13A (1). Broken Hill Theatres Pty. Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation 423
Police Regulation Act 1899-1947, ss. 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14. Attorney-General for New South Wales v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.) 237 Police Regulation (Superannuation) Act 1906-1944. Attorney-General for New South Wales v. Perpetual Trustee Co. (Ltd.) 237	
Stamp Duties Act 1920-1949, s. 41 (4) (a), (7). *Vickery v. Woods 336	Local Government Act 1946, s. 249 (1) (b) (ix).
1920-1949, ss. 102 (2) (d), 124. Oakes v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties of New South Wales - 386	Salvation Army (Victoria) Property Trust v. Shire of Fern Tree Gully - 159

RULES, REGULATIONS AND ORDERS JUDICIALLY CONSIDERED.

COMMONWEALTH.

National Secur	ity (T	War :	Ser	vice	Morate	oriu	m)
Regulations, Newspapers	regs	. 28	Α.	30.	Quee	nsla	nd
Newspapers	ı vg.	Dow.	٠.	1110	1 000000		

National Security (War Service Moratorium)
Regulations, regs, 28A, 30. Turner v.
York Motors Pty. Ltd. 55

TABLE OF CASES CITED IN JUDGMENTS.

Note.—The page numbers are those of the pages where the case is cited in each report. The numbers in brackets show the first footnote on each page containing the references to the cases.

	C 1 1 (T) 1) (1000) 400 (0)
A.	v. Sandwich (Earl) (1922) - 400 (6)
A CONTRACTOR TO TAIL	v. Seccombe (1911) 400 (5), 418 (3)
A. G. Healing & Co. Pty. Ltd. v.	v. Valle-Jones (1935) 242 (4), 252 (5),
Harris (1927) 454 (8), 462 (9)	259 (1), 260 (1), 280 (7), 302 (7)
A. W. Walker & Co. v. Inland	v. Worrall (Worrall's Case)
Revenue Commissioners (1920)	(1895) 399 (1)
316 (1), 317 (3), 330 (2)	(Canada) v. Jackson (1946) - 271 (1) (N.S.W.) v. Perpetual Trustee
Adams v. Chas. S. Watson Pty.	Co. T.d. (Wills Wills Coss) (1040) 105 (1)
Ltd. (1938) 92 (1)	Co. Ltd. (Milly Milly Case) (1940) 185 (1) (Vict.); Ex rel. Dale v.
Adamson v. Melbourne and Metro-	Commonwealth (1945) - 574 (1)
politan Board of Works (Adam-	Austine v. Retchless (1941) 152 (5), 154 (3)
son's Case) (1929) - 168 (4), 175 (1),	Australian Apple and Pear Market-
176 (5), 181 (6) Addar Khan v. Mullins (1920) 147 (8), 152 (6)	ing Board v. Tonking (Tonking's
Addar Khan v. Mullins (1920) 147 (8), 132 (6) Admiralty Commissioners v. S.S.	Case) (1942) 565 (1), 567 (1), 587 (1), 594 (2)
Admiratty Commissioners v. S.S. Amerika (Amerika Case) (1917)	Australian National Airways Pty.
243 (3), 257 (5), 259 (3), 261 (2),	Ltd. v. Commonwealth (1946) - 564 (3),
269 (3), 273 (4), 276 (2), 280 (1),	577 (2), 582 (3), 590 (2), 597 (1)
292 (5), 293 (1), 294 (1), 295 (2),	311 (2), 362 (3), 350 (2), 351 (1)
292 (3), 293 (1), 294 (1), 290 (2), 302 (2)	В.
Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of	
Victoria v. Nunawading Shire	B. Cordingley, Re (1948) - 412 (2)
(1920) 188 (1)	Bainbridge v. Postmaster-General
Allan v Barclay (1864) - 285 (2) 286 (6)	(1906) 283 (1)
Allen v. Bedding (1934) 462 (6)	Baker v. Dalgleish Steam Shipping
(1920) 188 (1) Allan v. Barclay (1864) - 285 (2), 286 (6) Allen v. Redding (1934) - 462 (6) Amad v. Grant (1947) - 86 (3), 91 (4)	Baker v. Dalgleish Steam Shipping Co. (1922) - 291 (9)
Amalgamated Engineering Union v .	Bank of New South Wales v. Com-
Alderdice Pty. Ltd.; In re Metro-	monwealth (1948) 566 (1)
politan Gas Co. (1928) 620 (1)	Banks' Case see Commonwealth v.
Amerika Case see Admiralty Com-	Bank of New South Wales.
	Barham v. Dennis (1630) - 296 (1) Barlow v. Teal (1885) - 176 (7)
missioners v . S.S. Amerika Andrews v . Howell (1941) - 594 (1)	Barlow v. Teal (1885) 176 (7)
Anglo-Newfoundland Development	Barras v. Aberdeen Steam Trawling
Co. v. Pacific Steam Navigation	and Fishing Co. Ltd. (Barras'
Co. (Anglo-Newfoundland Co.'s	Case) (1933) 83 (4), 174 (2),
Case) (1924) 464 (5)	(-), (-)
Anthony v. Stanton (1943) - $90 (4)$	Baume v. Commonwealth (1906) - 250 (1),
Associated Dominions Assurance	283 (9)
Society Pty. Ltd. v. Industrial Life	Baxter v. Commissioners of Taxation
Assurance Agents' Union (1950) - 154 (5)	(N.S.W.) (Baxter's Case) (1907) - 571 (1),
Associated Portland Cement Manu-	572 (4), 591 (1)
facturers Ltd. v. Inland Revenue	Beacon Life and Fire Assurance Co.
Commissioners (Associated Port-	v. Gibb (1862) 75 (4)
land Cement Manufacturer's	v. Gibb (1862) - - - 75 (4) Beattie v. Fine (1925) - - 93 (1) Bell v. Nigro (1898) - - 277 (1) Bernia, The [No. 2] (1887) - - 453 (1)
Case) (1946) - 429 (5), 430 (1), 431 (3)	Bell v. Nigro (1898) 277 (1)
Attorney-General v. Dublin United	Bernia, The [No. 2] (1887) - 453 (1)
Tramways Co. (1896) Ltd. (Dublin	Berringer v. Great Eastern Railway
Tramways Case) (1939) 243 (1), 280 (9),	Co. (1879) 266 (5) Biggs v. Peacock (1882) 412 (1)
281 (4), 282 (4)	Biggs v . Peacock (1882) - 412 (1)

Bird v. John Sharp & Sons Pty. Ltd.	
/10/6\	Car
Rimingham and District Land Co.	Cau
and Allday, In re (1893)	Che
Distance U Organd (1823)	0
Digin's Case see Real Estate Institute	· (
of New South Wales v. Blair.	<u>; `</u>
Bland Sutton's Will Trusts, In re	
	Cit
Bonvinon V. Common V. Common V.	I
Borough of Battersea v. British Iron	Cla
& Steel Research Association; British Launderers' Research	(
British Launderers Research Association v. Borough of Hendon	
	Cle
Rating Authority (1949) - 169 (2) —— Leichhardt v. Moran (1904) 162 (4)]
	(
Taxation, Commissioner of (W.A.)	Co
Doulder Perseverance Ltu.	Co
Boulus v. Broken Hill Theatres Pty.	Co
Boulus v. Broken Hill Theatres Pty. Ltd. (1949) - 226 (1), 427 (1) Bowen v. Hall (1881) - 296 (1) Boy Andrew v. St. Rognvald (1948) 459 (2)	Co
Bowen v. Hall (1881) 296 (1)	100
	Co
	١٣
Bradburn v. Great Western Rallway	
Co. (Bradburn's Case) (1874) - 291 (6),	
292 (3), 200 (0)	_
Bradford Corporation v. Webster	
(Bradford Corporation Case)	Co
$(1920) \ 242 \ (3), 252 \ (4), \ 257 \ (7), \ 258 \ (2), (2)$	1
(Bradford Corporation Case) (Bradford Corporation Case) (1920) 242 (3), 252 (4), 257 (7), 258 (2), 273 (2), 280 (5), 304 (1), 305 (1) Bradshaw v. McEwans Pty. Ltd. (1951) 358 (1), 362 (4)	1
Bradshaw v. McEwans Pty. Ltd.	Co
(1951) 358 (1), 302 (4)	1
Brennan Ex p.; Re Garside (1936) 102 (2), 103 (6)	1
100 (0)	
Bridge v. Grand Junction Railway	1
Co. (1838) 452 (2), 454 (1) Brigginshaw v. Brigginshaw (1938) 363 (1)	1
	-
British Columbia Electric Railway	۱_
(1016) 450 (9) 457 (1), 400 (1), 400 (1)	
Pritish Insulated and Helsby Caples	
T + J a. A + harton (British Insulated	
Cables Case) (1926) 429 (3), 433 (1), ± 34 (3)	-
British Sugar Manufacturers, Ltd.	
v. Harris (British Sugar Manufact	
$+_{11}$ $+_{12}$ $+_{13}$ $+_{13}$ $+_{14}$ $+_{15}$ $+$	1 -
334 (3), 335 (1)	C
Buckley's Trusts, In re (1883) - 410 (2) Builders' Labourers' Case see R. v.	
Builders' Labourers' Case see R. v.	c
Commonwealth Court of Concilia-	C
tion and Arbitration; Ex p. Jones; and Jones v. Common-	~
wealth Court of Conciliation and	C
Arbitration.	
	-1
Burnham v. Carroll Musgrove Theatres Ltd. (Burnham's Case)	
	I
v = (1928) 71 (3), 82 (1),	- 1 -
86 (1), 88 (1)	
Butterfield v. Forrester (1809) - 454 (2)	-
Bywell Castle, The (1879) - 450 (3)	1]

.		
TT 1 (1002)	_	29 (2)
Carter v. Hyde (1923) -		81 (10)
Caulfield v. Farr (1873)	miccioner	
Chesterman v. Federal Com	o's Case'	
of Taxation (Chesterman	181 (1)	183 (7)
(1923)	160 (1)	, 183 (7) 174 (5),
v. = (1923) (1926)	100 (3),	192 (8)
176 (4), 181 (3)), 102 (1)	, 100 (0)
Citizens' Life Assurance Co	o. Lta. v	140 /9\
Droven (1904)		110 (0)
Olamba Commissioner 101	Railway	3
(Clark's Case) (1936) -	99 (1),	100 (1),
103 (7), 106 (1)	, 100 (1),), 109 (1)
Clamonta and Marshall Pt	v. Ltd. v	•
Field Peas Marketing Bo	ara (1as.	1
(1047)	483 (1), 404 (1)
Cochrane, In re (1905) - Coffill's Settled Estate, In		- 406 (4)
G-Ell'a Sattled Estate. In	re (1920) 225 (2)
Cofield v. Waterloo Case	Co. Lto	ĺ.
Coneld v. Waterioo Cuse	-	- 362 (2)
(1924) (1859	2) -	- 80 (6),
Coggan v. Warwicker (1852	81 (1), 90 (8)
D A	. Foster	1), 00 (0)
Collins v. Hunter see R. v	Town Sout	'n
Ex p. Rural Bank of N	lew Sout	11
Wales; Wagner v. Gal	i; Conn	ıs
Unnter		
Togonh Adams	on & C	0.
(C. 11:) (Coco) (1938)	429 (4	E1. 401 (1)
Attorney-General 101	the Con	•
loc marria olth at Bank	of Ne	w
485 (2), 497 (1) 534 (1), 536 (1) 567 (2), 570 (2) 588 (2), 589 (3) v. Quince (Quin	(), 537 (1), 539 (2),
567 (2) 570 (2	2). 572 (1), 581 (2),
509 (2), 589 (5	2) 593 (1), 595 (1)
Orings (Quin	ce's Cas	e)
(1943) - (1944)	243 (5	5), 244 (5),
v. — (1944)	0 955 (1	256 (1)
250 (3), 253 (5	2), 200 (1) 262 (1)
259 (2), 260 (5 259 (1), 267 (5 266 (1), 267 (6 271 (2), 272 (6	2), 201 (1), 202 (1),
266 (1), 267 (1), 208 (1), 270 (1),
271 (2), 272 (1), 273 (5), 274 (1),
275 (1), 276 (6 280 (2), 284 (4	5), 278 (4), 279 (1),
280 (2), 284 (4	1), 286 (5	0), 287 (2),
	290 (3), 302 (8)
v. Welsh (1947)	- 1 - - 1 - 1 - 1	- 269 (5)
Commonwealth Steamshi Association v. Watersid	ip Owne	rs'
Association v. Watersid	e Worke	rs'
I To Jametian of Augustinalia	1. (1.940)	- 020 (1)
Considing v. McIngraey (Craven's Estate, In re; L	1916)	- 101 (4)
Crayon's Estate In re: L	lovds Ba	nk
Ltd. v. Cockburn (No.	2) (1937)	- 220(1)
Currin v. Wallace (1939)		- 477 (1)
Currii v. Wallace (1990)		
D.		
D.		
n . T'ull-ichn /109	3) -	- 276 (7)
Davies v. Littlejohn (192	454 (4), 455 (5),
v. Mann (1842) -	- AR1	(1) 465 (1)
~	401	(1), 465 (1) - 459 (3)
v. Swan Motor Co		- 450 (0) 17\ 01 (0\
Dawes v. Dowling (1874)	80	(7), 81 (2)

C.

66 (4), 81 (6)

- 362 (3) - 290 (1)

Fisher v. Oldham Corporation (Oldham Corporation Case) (1930) - 258 (3), 261 (3), 265 (4), 280 (3),

282 (1), 304 (2), 305 (2) Flannery v. Waterford & Limerick

Railway Co. (1877)

Flemington v. Smithers (1826)

(1893)

16(2) - 290 (2)

Horne v. Coleman (1929)
Hotchkys, In re; Freke v. Calmady

Howard v. Patent Ivory Manufac-

Huddart Parker Ltd. v. Stevedoring

Industry Commission (1946)

turing Co. (Howard's Case) (1888) 349 (1) Howe v. Lord Dartmouth (1802) - 217(1)

Hurry v. Hurry (1870) 411 (5) Hyett v. Lennard (1940) 314 (1)	Last v. London Assurance Corporation (1885)
Hyett v. Lennard (1940) - 314 (1)	Leahy's Case see Ranways, Commis-
Kirkali da Mila	sioner of v . Leahy.
	Learoyd v. Whitely (1987) - 232 (2) Lemon v. Lardeur (1946) - 86 (2), 91 (3)
Ilford Corporation v. Mallinson	Tife Accurance Lanvassers publish.
(1932)	$D_{0} = D_{0} = D_{0$
Income Tax. Commissioners for	$ T_{i+t} _{e_{2}}$ Commonwealth (1947) $ T_{i+t} _{e_{2}}$
Special Purposes of v. Pemsel	Loach's Case see British Columbia
(Pemsel's Case) (1891) 173 (5), 176 (1),	Flectric Railway Co. Ltd. v. Loach.
181 (5), 182 (4), 184 (1)	Lory v. Great Western Railway Co.
${f J}_{f s}$	(Lory's Case) (1942) - 291 (7) Lumley v. Gye (1853) - 245 (1), 247 (2),
	Lumley v. Gye (1853) - $\frac{245}{296}$ (1), $\frac{247}{297}$ (2), $\frac{247}{296}$ (6), $\frac{297}{297}$ (3)
J. T. C. Mayne, Re (1928) - 223 (1) Jackson v. Magrath (1947) - 284 (3) James v. Commonwealth (1936) - 484 (3), 516 (5) 517 (1) 539 (3)	Lumley v. Gye (1853) - 245 (1), 247 (2), 287 (3), 296 (6), 297 (3)
J. T. C. Mayne, he (1920) Laskson & Magrath (1947) - 284 (3)	
Jackson v. Magrath (1936) - 484 (3),	M.
G_{envan} (1932) - 484 (2), 486 (1),	McArthur v. The King (McArthur's
#16 (4) 517 (1) 529 (2) 350 (4).	Case) (1943) 271 (3)
531 (1), 538 (2), 539 (5), 544 (2) 531 (1), 538 (2), 539 (5), 544 (2) v. South Australia (1927) - 516 (3),	McDermott v. Owners of S.S. Tin-
v. South Australia (1921) - 516 (5), 517 (1), 529 (1), 530 (1), 538 (1),	toretto (1911) 101 (1) Mackenzie v. Childers (1889) - 17 (2)
517 (1), 529 (1), 550 (1), 553 (1), 544 (1)	
James' Cases (James v. Common-	M'Mahon v. David Lawson Edd. (1944) - 268 (4) McNamara v. Quinn (1947) 75 (2), 83 (1)
wealth James v. Cowan, James	McNamara v. Quinn (1947) 75 (2), 83 (1)
Courts Augstralia (1936), (1932)	Wankin v. Scala Theodrome Co. Ltd.
(1097)	(Mankin's Case) (1947) 266 (6), 286 (2), 295 (3)
Jameson v. Kinmell Bay Land Co.	Gerbon (1841) 257 (3) 288 (2)
Ltd. (1931) Jodrell v. Jodrell (1851) Jodrell v. Jodrell (1851) Jodrell v. Jodrell (1851)	Martinez v. Gerber (1941) 201 (0), 203 (1), 297 (1)
Tobason Fear & Kingham and the	Martinez v. Gerber (1841) 257 (3), 288 (2), 295 (1), 297 (1) Maslen v. Laffer (1950) - 552 (11)
Office Dinting Co Ptv. Ltd. V.	
Commonwealth (1943) 309 (1)	Board (Vict.) (1938) 482 (1), 485 (1),
Topog a Commonwealth Court of	518 (1), 532 (1), 536 (2)
Conciliation and Arbitration	Mayfair Property Co. v. Johnston
(Builders' Labourers' Case) (1917) 564 (1), 575 (3), 576 (1), 582 (1), 588 (1)	(1894) 411 (3) Mayne, Re (1947) - 75 (3), 83 (2)
Shears (1836) - $66(5)$	Melbourne Corporation v. Barry (1922) - 183 (1)
v. Shears (1836) - 66 (5) Jonesco v. Beard (1930) - 645 (1)	(1922) - 183 (1)
locanh & Swallow & Allen Bea.	Mersey Docks and Darbour Doard
(1022) - $\pm 02 (\pm)$	" Coggins and Griffith (Liverboot)
T 1 and Navigation Acts, In	Ltd. (1947) 300 (2)
re (1921) 155 (1)	Metal Trades Employers Association
	v. Amalgamated Engineering Union (1935) - 143 (1)
	Metropolitan Police District, Re-
Kelly v. Municipal Council of Sydney	ceiver for v. Tatum (latum's
(Kelly's Case) (1920) - 180 (3), 183 (6) Kelner v. Baxter (1866) - 348 (2)	Case) (1948) - 273 (3), 280 (12), 281 (5), 305 (5)
Kelner v. Baxter (1866) 348 (2)	201 (3), 303 (3)
Triple and a Commissioner for Itoau	Metropolitan Water Board v. Paine (1907) - 84 (1)
	lar i am and South American Co.
Transport and Trainways (Rink wood's Case) (1936) - 103 (5) Knight v. Williams (1901) - 91 (2)	$In \ re \ (1859)$ - 627 (1)
Knight v. Williams (2002)	In re (1859) 627 (1) Mills v. Mills (1938) - 531 (4)
	Milly Milly Case see Attorney Gen-
	eral for N.S.W. v. Perpetual
Lake Victoria Ltd. v. Commissioner	Trustee Co. Ltd. Mines, Case of (1613) - 247 (1)
of Stomp Duties (1949) $3\pm 3(1)$, $3\pm 1(1)$	Mirams In re (1891) 258 (1)
Larke Hoskins & Co. Ltd. v. Icher	Moore v. Dimond (1929) 66 (1), 68 (1),
	74 (1), 81 (8), 90 (3)
La Société Anonyme de Remorquage à Hélice v. Bennetts (1911) - 276 (1)	Morice v. Bishop of Durham (1805) - 173 (6)
a Hence v. Boundary	

Morrison, In re; Morrison v. Morrison (1901) Mount Edgecumbe (Earl of), In re (1950)	Parker v. Gerrard (1745) - 411 (2) Payne v. Railway Executive (1951) 291 (8) v. (1952) 292 (2), 293 (4)
(1950) 225 (1) Municipal and General Securities Co. Ltd. v. Lloyd's Bank Ltd. (1950) 222 (1)	Peanut Board v. Rockampton Har- bour Board (Peanut Case) (1933) 516 (1), 538 (3), 539 (1), 540 (1), 542 (1) Pearse's Case see Stamp Duties
Municipal Council of Sydney v. Salvation Army (N.S.W. Property	(N.S.W.), Commissioner of v . Pearse.
Trust) (1931) 173 (2) Municipal Tramways Trust v. Buckley (1912) 454 (9), 461 (6), 462 (7)	Pemsel's Case see Income Tax, Commissioners for Special Purposes of v. Pemsel.
Munro v. Commissioner of Stamp Duties (Munro's Case) (1934) - 398 (1),	Perpetual Executors and Trustees Association of Australia Ltd. v.
400 (1), 406 (1), 407 (2), 414 (1), 418 (1) Musgrave v. Commonwealth (1937) 250 (2)	Federal Commissioner of Taxation (Thomas's Case) (1949) - 266 (2) Perpetual Trustee Case see Stamp
N.	Duties (N.S.W.), Commissioner of v. Perpetual Trustee Co. Ltd.
Natal Land and Colonization Co. Ltd. v. Pauline Colliery and Devel-	Perpetual Trustee Co. Ltd. v. Kelly (1928) - 223 (1) Pirrie v. McFarlane (1925) 572 (3), 576 (3)
opment Syndicate Ltd. (Natal Land and Colonization Co. Ltd.'s	Platz v. Osborne (1943) - 83 (6) Pratt's Will Trusts, In re; Barrow
Case) (1904) 345 (1), 348 (4), 349 (2) Neall v. Beadle (1913) 66 (6) Nelson, Ex p. [No. 2] (1929) 564 (2),	v. McCarthy (1943) - 219 (1), 222 (2) Purvis v. Traill (1849) - 169 (1)
575 (4), 577 (1), 582 (2) Nelungaloo Pty. Ltd. v. Common-	Q.
wealth (Nelungaloo Case) (1948) - 560 (1), 567 (5), 568 (1), 579 (1), 581 (1), 586 (1), 587 (2), 592 (1), 600 (1)	Quartermaine v. McCleery (1947) - 73 (1), 91 (7) Queen's Club Gardens Estates Ltd.
v (1951) 560 (2), 567 (3), 570 (1), 572 (2), 575 (1), 576 (2), 583 (1), 586 (2), 588 (1), 589 (1),	v. Bignell (1924) - 91 (8) Queen's College v. Melbourne Corporation (Queen's College Case) (1905)
New, Re (1901) 228 (1), 229 (1), 235 (2)	163 (3), 168 (1), 174 (1), 176 (2), 177 (3), 180 (1), 182 (3), 183 (3)
North British Rly. Co. v. Budhill Coal & Sandstone Co. (1910) - 176 (8) North Sydney Investment and	Queensland Newspapers Pty. Ltd. v. McTavish (1951) - 76 (1), 84 (5) Queensland Stations Pty. Ltd. v.
Tramway Co. Ltd. v. Higgins (1899) 348 (3) Northumberland Avenue Hotel Co.,	Federal Commissioner of Taxation (1945) 152 (8), 284 (5) Quince's Case see Commonwealth v.
In re (1886) 349 (4) Nunawading Shire v. Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria	Quince. Quinn v . Leathem (1901) - 296 (9)
(Nunawading Case) (1921) 167 (1), 168 (2), 169 (3), 170 (1), 171 (1), 172 (5).	R.
173 (3), 178 (1), 179 (1), 183 (9), 187 (1), 188 (2)	R. v. Blakeley; Ex p. Association of Architects, Engineers, Surveyors and Draughtsmen of Australia
O. Oakes v. Commissioner of Stamp	(1950) - 158 (1) - v. Collins (1907) 369 (1), 379 (2), 383 (3)
Duties (1951)	— v . Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration; $Ex p$. Brisbane Tramways Co. Ltd.; $Ex p$. Municipal Tramways Trust,
Orr v. Holmes (1948) - 642 (1), 643 (1) P.	Adelaide [No. 1] (Tramways Case) (1914) 146 (1) - v ; Ex p. Ozone Theatres
P. J. Magennis Pty. Ltd. v. Common-	(Aust.) Ltd. (1949) 144 (3) - v. ——— (Builders' Labourers'
wealth (1949) 515 (1) Parker v. Dowling (1916) - 410 (3)	Case) (1914) - 547 (3), 576 (4) - v. Crippen (1911) - 379 (10)

os	
R. v. Day (1940) 379 (9)	St. Aubyn v. Attorney-General (St.
R. v. Day (1940)	Aubyn's Case) (1952) 398 (4), 399 (2),
v. Foster; Ex p. Rural Bank of New South Wales; Wagner v.	400 (3), 406 (3), 407 (3),
Gall; Collins v. Hunter (1949) - 42 (1),	413 (3), 418 (2)
	Salomon v. A. Salomon & Co. Ltd.
- v. Frost (1839) - 2 (2), 53 (1), 84 (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (52 (2), 53 (1), 379 (1), 380 (1), 383 (1) (1) (1) (1) (1) (1) (1) (1) (1) (1)	(1897) 533 (2)
378 (1) 379 (1)	(100.)
-v. Frost (1059)	Sandry v. Commissioner for Railways
379 (6)	(Sandry's Case) (1935) - 103 (2)
-v. Harris (1927) $-379 (7)$	(Sandry's Case) (1935) - 103 (2) Scarman v. Castell (1795) - 291 (2)
-v. Liddle (1928) 379 (8)	Scott v. Scott (1863) 642 (2) Sellan v. Norman (1829) - 291 (1)
v. Richardson (and Adams)	Sellan v. Norman (1829) 291 (1)
- v. Richardson (and Adams) (Richardson's Case) (1948) 243 (2)	Shaw Saville & Albion Ltd. v. Com-
(Richardson's Case) (1345) 227 (2), 270 (2), 271 (5), 280 (11), 281 (3)	monwealth (1940) - 252 (1), 283 (5)
270 (2), 271 (0), 200 (11), 201 (0)	Short v. J. & W. Henderson Ltd.
-v. Smith (1837)	(1946) 297 (4)
-v. Smith (1837) 291 (4) -v. Stimpson (1826) 379 (5) -v. Sullivan (1923) - 379 (11)	Sidebotham v. Holland (1895) $73(4)$, 91(6)
Radley v. London & North-Western	Simkin v. Ashurst (1834) - 81 (9) Simms v. Lee (1945) - 75 (1), 83 (3) Smaill v. Alexander (1904) - 291 (5)
Railway Co. (Radley's Case) (1876) 452 (4),	Simms v. Lee (1945) - 75 (1), 83 (3)
455 (4), 456 (1), 459 (8), 460 (2),	Smaill v. Alexander (1904) 291 (5)
461 (3), 462 (3), 463 (2), 465 (2)	Smith v. British European Airways
Railways, Commissioner of v. Leahy	Composition (1051) 292 (1)
(Leahy's Case) (1904) 454 (6), 457 (2),	Corporation (1951) 292 (1)
(Leany's Case) (1001) 464 (2)	Southern v. Borax Consolidated Ltd.
v. Sandry (1936) - 103 (3)	
Raphael's Case see S.S. Raphael,	
Owners of v . Brandy.	Southport Corporation v. Corpora-
Reading v. Attorney-General (1951) 265 (5),	tion of the Trustees of the Order
302 (3)	of the Sisters of Mercy in Queens-
Real Estate Institute of New South	land (1935) - 161 (4), 162 (9), 171 (2)
Weles v Blair (Blair's case)	Southwell v. Savill Bros. Ltd. (1901) 431 (1),
(1046)40(1), 32(1)	435 (1)
Reavis v. Clan Line Steamers Ltd.	Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co.
(1025) $286(3)$	Ltd. v. Doreen Appliances Ltd.
Richard Evans & Co. Ltd. v. Astley	(1942) 80 (2), 89 (1)
(1011) - $308(2), 302(1)$	Squire v. Campbell (1836) - 15 (2)
Richardson v. Langridge (1811) - 90 (2)	S.S. Raphael, Owners of v. Brandy
Richardson's Case see R. v. Richard-	(Panhaol's Case) (The Raphael
	Case) (1911) - 266 (3), 268 (3),
son (and Adams). Rist v. Faux (1863) 285 (1)	
Road Transport and Tramways,	Stamp Duties (N.S.W.), Commis-
Commissioner for v. Frerauer	sioner of v. Pearse (Pearse's Case)
$(1950) - - - 466 \ (1)$	(1951) 412 (5), 413 (3)
Robert Mary's Case (1612) - 266 (7)	v. Perpetual Trustee Co.
Robinson Brothers (Brewers) Ltd.	Ltd. (Hall's Case) (Perpetual
v. County of Durham Assessment	Trustee Case) (1943) 398 (2), 400 (2),
Committee (1938) 174 (3)	406 (2), 407 (1), 414 (2), 417 (1)
Ronpibon Tin (N.L.) v. Federal Com-	v. Way (1951) - 398 (3), 413 (2)
missioner of Taxation (1949) - 429 (1)	Stanbury v. Exeter Corporation (1905) - 280 (4)
Royal Australasian College of Sur-	(1905) 280 (4)
geons v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation (1943) - 161 (3), 172 (1)	Standard Oil Case see United States
Royal Choral Society v. Commis-	v. Standard Oil Co. of California.
sioners of Inland Revenue (Royal	State Electricity Commission of
Choral Society Case) (1943) 172 (4), 173 (1)	Victoria v. Gay (Gay's Case) (1951)
Royal Court Derby Porcelain Co.	450 (1), 451 (1), 452 (1), 459 (6),
Ltd. v. Russell (1949) 83 (5), 174 (4)	462 (1), 463 (3), 464 (3)
Rural Bank of New South Wales v.	Strang, In re (1941) - 213 (2), 214 (1), 218 (1), 220 (2), 221 (1),
Hayes (1951) 249 (2)	218 (1), 220 (2), 221 (1),
Ryder v. Foley (1906) 303 (3)	226 (1), 229 (2), 234 (1)
	Summergreene v. Parker (Summer-
S.	greene's Case) (1950) - 80 (5), 89 (2),
S. Richards & Co. Ltd. v. Lloyd	340 (4), 347 (2), 348 (1)
(1933) 129 (1)	Summers v. Roberts (1944) - 84 (2)

Sun Newspapers Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation (Sun Newspapers Case) (1938) 313 (2), 429 (6), 430 (3), 431 (2), 433 (2), 434 (1) Surtees v. Ellison (1829) - 626 (3) Swinburne v. Federal Commissioner	United States v. Standard Oil Co. of California (Standard Oil Case) (1947) - 253 (1), 280 (10), 281 (1), 286 (1), 302 (1) V.
of Taxation (Swinburne's Case) (1920) 180 (2), 181 (2), 182 (2), 183 (5) Symons v. Stacey (1922) 454 (7), 461 (7), 462 (8)	Vanderplank v . Miller (1828) 454 (3), 455 (2) Victorian Railway Commissioners v .
Т.	Herbert (1949) 249 (1) Volute Case (Commissioners for Executing Office of Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom
Tatum's Case see Metropolitan Police District, Receiver for v. Tatum. Taxation, Commissioner of (W.A.) v. Boulder Perseverance Ltd.	v. S.S. Volute) (1922) 464 (4) Von Hatzfeldt-Wildenburg v. Alexander (1912) 80 (1)
(Boulder Perseverance Case) (1937) - 317 (4), 330 (3), 334 (1) ————————————————————————————————————	W. & A. McArthur Ltd. v. Queens-
Green (1950) 429 (2)	land (1920) - 471 (1), 574 (2) Warner v. Baynes (1750) - 411 (1) Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia v. Commonwealth
Taylor v. Grange (1880) - 411 (6) - 2. Neri (1795) - 299 (1) Tennant Plays, Ltd. v. Inland Revenue Commissioners (1948) - 172 (2) Thetford, Mayor &c. of v. Tyler	Steamship Owners' Association (1920) 628 (1) Watson v. Winch (1916) - 627 (2)
(1845) 81 (5) Thiel v. Mutual Life & Citizens' Assurance Co. Ltd.; Ex p. Thiel	Watts v. Manchester Corporation (1917) 101 (5) Wav v. Commissioner of Stamp
(1919) - 152 (4), 154 (2) Thomas, In re; Thomas v. Thomp- son (1930) - 224 (1) Thomas's Case see Perpetual Execu-	Duties (N.S.W.) (1949) - 413 (1) Wennall v. Adney (1802) - 291 (3) Wheare v. Clarke (1937) 458 (2), 460 (3), 464 (1)
tors and Trustees Association of Australia Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation.	Whitehouse v. Hugh (1906) - 15 (4), 16 (1) Whitely, In re; Whiteley v. Learoyd (1886) - 232 (1) Wilds v. Amalgamated Anthracite
Thompson v. Armstrong & Royse Pty. Ltd. (1950) 101 (2), 102 (1), 103 (1) Tindall v. Castle (1893) - 16 (4) Titheradge v. The King (1917) - 379 (3)	Collieries Ltd. (1947) - 244 (3) Williams v. Commissioner for Road Transport and Tramways (N.S.W.) (1933) - 461 (5), 462 (5)
Tobin v. The Queen (1863) 250 (4), 251 (1) 	—— v. Glasbrook Brothers, Ltd.
Tonking's Case see Australian Apple and Pear Marketing Board v. Tonking. Tramways Case see R. v. Common-	(1947) 244 (2) v. Holland (1833) - 246 (1) Willshire v. Dalton (1948) 90 (5), 91 (5) Wilson v. Brett (1843) - 455 (1) Wishart v. Fraser (1941) 473 (3), 484 (5) Worrall's Case see Attorney-General
wealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration; $Ex p$. Brisbane Tramways Co. Ltd.; $Ex p$. Municipal Tramways Trust, Adelaide	v. Worrall. Wright v. Cedzich (1930) - 276 (3) Y.
[No. 1]. Tuff v. Warman (1858) - 451 (2), 452 (3), 455 (3), 459 (7), 460 (1),	Yellow Cabs of Australia Ltd. v. Colgan (1930) - 147 (9), 152 (2) Yewens v. Noakes (1880) - 300 (1)
461 (2), 462 (2), 463 (1) U.	Yewens v. Noakes (1880) - 300 (1) Young v. Bristol Aeroplane Co. Ltd. (1944) - 244 (1)
Unemployment Insurance Act (1920) In re (1922) - 299 (2)	z.
United Collieries Ltd. v. Inland Revenue Commissioners (1930) - 313 (1)	Zachariassen v. Commonwealth (1917) - 284 (1)

CORRIGENDA.

Page 138—In fourth line from foot of page, for "was not in fact" read "was in fact".

Page 155—In line 21, for "is not in fact" read "is in fact".

Page 237—In line 2 of catchwords, for "Number of police" read "Member of police".