

## **Peter Forrest**

Chancellor,

I have the pleasure of presenting Peter Johnston Forrest, who has been awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Peter grew up on sheep station near Longreach, in western Queensland. It was an isolated place but his family's homestead was well stocked with books among whom Peter found many friends. His Correspondence school teachers encouraged him to write while his parents introduced him to Australia's history, taking pains to show him places where significant historic events had occurred.

In Brisbane as a young man he began work as the first Director of the National Trust of Queensland. In early 1975 he was seconded from that position to come to Darwin to report on cyclone damage to the city's historic sites. Three years later he moved permanently to Darwin.

He began a public campaign to develop the community's recognition of and regard for the Territory's heritage places. One of his early successes was to persuade the Everingham government that the piles of rubble that before Cyclone Tracy had been the old courthouse and police station, on The Esplanade, should be reconstructed and put to use as offices for the Administrator. Today the site is one of Darwin's proudest adornments. Peter also successfully lobbied for the

establishment of an Oral History committee and eventually for the creation of a Heritage Council and the introduction of heritage protection legislation.

In 1982 Peter began work as a freelance writer and heritage consultant. Since then he has published more than 30 books, many in collaboration with his wife Sheila and many of them focused on the lives of Territorians, whether they be First Nations or recent arrivals. Throughout, he has generously shared his knowledge and resources with people who seek historical information.

Peter says that his objective has always been to take history off the shelf and make it accessible and meaningful to everyone. To that end, he presented countless broadcasts for the ABC during a twenty-five-year period when he was called the ABC's 'resident historian'. In 1996 he began writing a weekly series of history features for the NT News. The series was enlarged by special supplements about historical subjects of topical relevance, such as the bombing of Darwin.

The events of World War Two in the Territory have been a particular focus of Peter's attention. Never afraid to challenge historical orthodoxy, he has strongly emphasised that 'war isn't only about soldiers', and he has brought the social impacts of the war to much greater attention.

In total, Peter's work comprises an invaluable documentation of Territory history. He now pledges that his work will continue for as long as he is able to do it.

Chancellor,

In recognition of his contribution to recording and facilitating the understanding of the history of Australia's inland and northern places, Charles Darwin University Council awards Peter Johnston Forrest the degree of Doctor of Letters, *Honoris Causa*.