

Alexander Christy Freeleagus

Alex Freeleagus was born in Brisbane in 1928 and attended Church of England Grammar School, East Brisbane. He then attended the University of Queensland and for a time was resident at King's College, located in those days at River Terrace, Kangaroo Point.

Even during his university days, Alex acted as Vice-Consul for Greece, carrying out his duties under the tutelage of his father, Christy Freeleagus, who was the Greek Consul in Queensland. Alex's father passed away at a relatively young age in 1957 and the Greek Government appointed Alex to succeed his father as the Greek Consul for Queensland.

I can recall Alex's participation in university life in those days and recall some of his colleagues, including Peter Rowland, Graeme Morris, Frank McLaughlin, Gabriel Ruddy and Harold Westaway. He graduated in law in 1953, at the same time serving articles with Charles Wilson, the senior partner of the firm Messrs Tully & Wilson.

I can recall that Alex was the favourite son of the law faculty – which of course comprised probably only about 30 to 40 day students in those days – the reason being that Alex drove his father's big black Pontiac with its consular corps numberplates from the city to St Lucia to attend lectures. Although he might have had an empty vehicle when he arrived at the uni., it was bursting with students when returning to the city.

Alex was admitted as a solicitor in Queensland in December 1953 and not long afterwards secured a position with Henderson & Lahey. At that firm, Alex acted for some of the largest land developers and, in particular, canal estate developers in Queensland.

Alex became a partner in Henderson & Lahey in 1955, just two years after he commenced work there as a newly admitted solicitor.

Whilst the practice grew, Alex also participated in the activities of many community and legal groups. I can recall that Alex was the first convener and events coordinator appointed to conduct the first legal symposium conducted by the Queensland Law Society, which took place at Caloundra in 1961.

From small beginnings, the annual Queensland Law Society Symposium (both solicitors and barristers) grew into the largest annual symposium of its kind in Australia. Alex's expertise in organising and administering the events and the social programs was so valued that he held this position for something over 20 years.

Alex was closely involved with the early development of the oil industry following the finding of oil at Moonie in Queensland. This led to a close association with two companies – Oil Company of Australia Limited, and Phillips Petroleum. Alex became a director of Oil Company of Australia Limited and sat on its board for many



Alexander Freeleagus, centre, with Harry Westaway, left, and Graeme Morris at the 'Ekka' in August 1953.

years, ultimately becoming chairman. That company subsequently became part of Origin Energy Limited.

Alex also participated in many organisations, service and community groups during these years. He was a member of the University of Queensland Air Squadron, which was active between 1951 and 1972, and subsequently took up flying and obtained his pilot's licence.

He owned a number of aircraft and flying became a significant pastime for him. Alex also joined the City of Brisbane 23rd Squadron and was a very active member, advancing to the rank of wing commander. Alex served on the RAAF reserve and received his RFD award for his long years of service. He also saw active service in Vietnam, as part of the RAAF Legal Reserve.

Alex maintained his interest and support of service life throughout the next 50 years and right up to the end. His interest in the whole spectrum of aviation and his involvement with the RAAF served to make him one of the state's early specialist aviation lawyers.

Alex was a very keen and dedicated supporter of the Greek community in Brisbane. His position as general consul enabled him to join in and sponsor all types of support organisations to help the Greek community in Brisbane and in Queensland.

Alex became senior partner of Henderson & Lahey when Sir Neville Henderson and Tim Lahey both retired in 1971. The practice attracted many clients from the business and mining sections. Alex derived great satisfaction in acting for Reg Ansett whose company later became Ansett ANA, the largest airline in Australia for many years.

Alex used to recount the story of how one day a Mr Reg Ansett called at Henderson & Lahey and announced "My name is Reg Ansett and I want to buy an island" (Daydream Island). This was followed by the purchase of Hayman Island.

In 1982, Alex was appointed as the head

attaché for the Commonwealth Games held in Brisbane. In 1988, he was appointed as Greece's Commissioner General for World Expo 1988.

Alex's firm Henderson & Lahey merged with Trout Bernays and Tingle in 1984. In 1992, the merged firm joined the Sydney firm of Clayton Utz in a federation of legal firms practising in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Perth and Darwin, to ultimately become the national firm of Clayton Utz.

Alex retired as senior partner of Clayton Utz Brisbane in 1993 and in the succeeding years right up until the time of his death served as an active consultant to the firm.

Alex's achievements and awards are set out fully in the recent edition of Who's Who of Australia. They are too numerous to mention here, but receiving the CBE, the AO and an honorary degree of Doctor of the University from Griffith University in 1999, were only a few of a host of well-deserved recognitions which gave him great pride and joy.

Alex never married. As a brother, he never wavered from his love and support of his family, comprising his sister and brother-in-law – Nick and Rene Nicolaidis and family, and his sister Evie Freeleagus.

Alex was regarded as a friend to all. He had contacts and friends in every layer of society.

Alex's passing was as he would have had it. He was on a boat off Heron Island on a lovely sunny day, in the company of ambassadorial colleagues and friends. The last day of his life was spent doing three things he really loved – flying, boating and being with friends.

Alex's passing is a great loss, not only to the firm of Clayton Utz, but to the many people in Queensland whose lives he touched. If there is some comfort to be gained, it is in the knowledge that Alex's legacy lives on in his contributions not only to Queensland's legal profession, but to the wider community. ■

George Deeb, consultant, Clayton Utz