

## **HIS HONOUR JUDGE ALFRED PAXTON BACKHOUSE – FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (1892–94, 1896–99, 1911–14)**

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (BA 1873 and MA 1875), His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse was a Fellow of Senate of the University from 1887 to 1939. He was elected as Vice-Chancellor, by and from Fellows, from 1892 to 1894, 1896 to 1899 and 1911 to 1914. In 1912 he was confirmed as a lifetime Fellow of Senate.

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### **PROFILE**

(1851 - 1939)

MA *Sydney*

**Fellow of Senate 1887 - 1939, including election by Senate as  
– Vice-Chancellor 1892 - 1894, 1896 - 1899 and 1911 - 1914**

### **His early days**

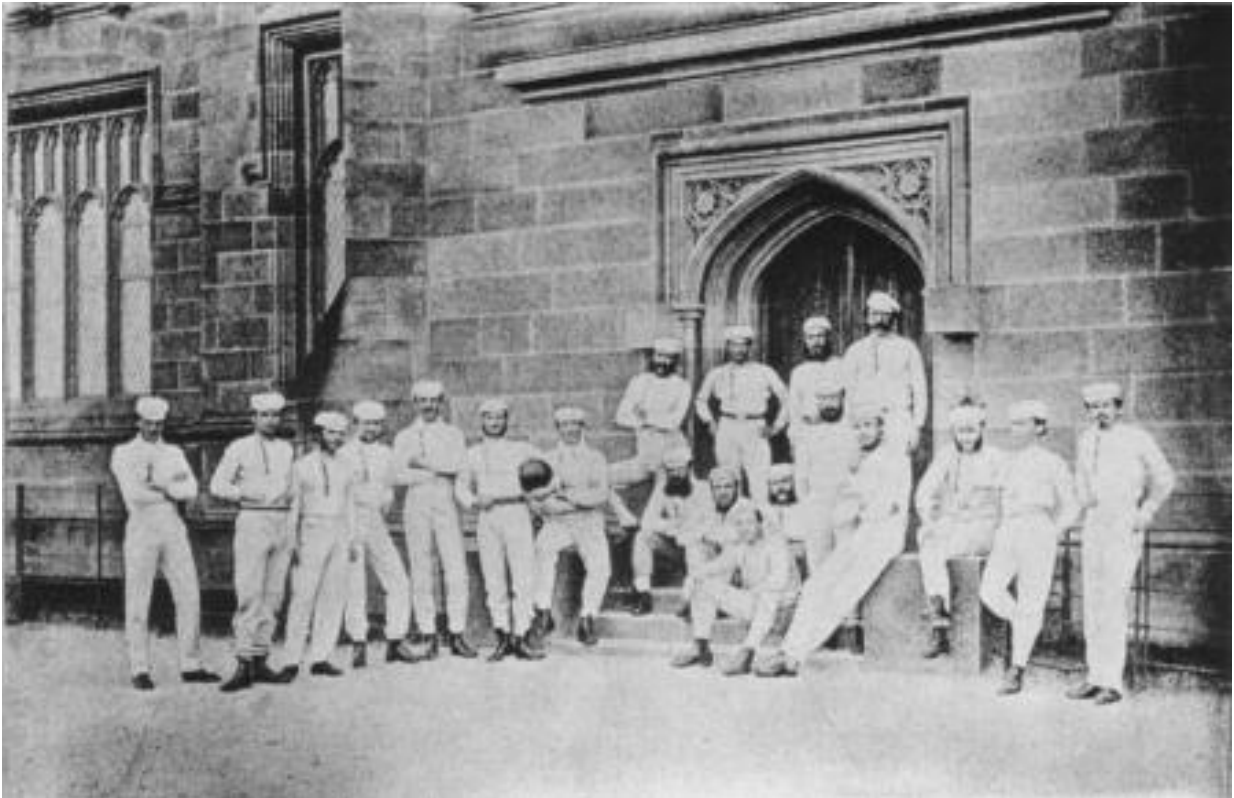
Alfred Paxton Backhouse was born at Ipswich, Suffolk, England, on 25 May 1851 and lived with his family in England, Victoria and in Queensland where he attended Ipswich Grammar School.

### **His student days at the University of Sydney**

Backhouse was an undergraduate Arts student at the University from 1870 to 1872.

In 1870 he won prizes in Chemical and Experimental Physics, in Classics and in Mathematics as well as the Levey Scholarship. In 1871 he again won prizes in Chemical and Experimental Physics, in Classics and in Mathematics as well as the Lithgow Scholarship.

He graduated Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Classics and First Class Honours in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1873, and Master of Arts in 1875.



Alfred Paxton Backhouse (second from left) in the Football Club team in 1871, *photo G3\_224\_0168, University of Sydney Archives.*

### **His career**

After teaching at Sydney Grammar School, he was admitted to the Bar on 16 December 1876 and his legal career prospered, with commercial and maritime matters as his principal interests.

Highlights of his legal career included: 1878: crown prosecutor; 1884: acting District Court judge and a permanent member of the bench; and acting on occasions as a Supreme Court judge.

He retired in 1921, but remained active in public life.

His varied interests included: president of the New South Wales Rowing Association, the United Charities Fund, the Navy League and the Benevolent Society of New South Wales; long-term councillor of the Royal Australian Historical Society; and a member of the Sydney Philharmonic Society.

He died at his home at Elizabeth Bay on 1 August 1939.

*From the Australian Dictionary of Biography*



His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse in the 1880s, shortly after the young Judge had received his appointment to the District Court Bench, *photo, The Sydney Mail, 21 August 1935, Google News Archive.*



His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse in 1913, *photo from the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, digital order number a928725.*



His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse, *photo from the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, digital order number gpo1\_21611.*



From left: Mrs Backhouse, Judge Backhouse and Sister Greenwood in the grounds of Melita, the Judge's residence in Elizabeth Bay, *photo, The Sydney Mail, 14 August 1935, Google News Archive.*

## **His membership of Senate**

Backhouse served on the Senate of the University of Sydney from 1887 to 1939. He was elected Vice-Chancellor in 1892-94, 1896-99 and 1911-14.

When the 1912 amending legislation created new conditions for the appointment of Fellows of Senate, his lifetime tenure was specifically confirmed.

In addition, he was a fellow of St Paul's College until 1928 when he resigned on a matter of domestic policy. An original member of the Sydney University Union, he helped to reconstitute it as a large-scale club in 1913 and was its lifelong supporter. Interested in music and drama, and in all kinds of organized sport, he fostered these outside and inside the university.

In December 1937 Senate resolved as follows: "His Honour Judge Backhouse has been a member of the Senate for more than fifty years, first as a Fellow elected by the graduates and then for nearly twenty-five years as a Fellow upon whom Parliament conferred the honour of life membership. The University owes him a debt of gratitude for his wise counsel and his devotion to its welfare and advancement. The Senate desires to offer him most cordial congratulations on his long record of distinguished service, and every good wish for his health and happiness."

At the meeting held in August 1939, the Senate received the news of the death of Judge Backhouse and unanimously adopted the following resolution: "It is with profound regret that the Senate records the death, on the 1st August, 1939, of His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse, MA.

The Senate desires to express its deep sense of the great loss sustained by the University through the passing of one who was a Fellow of the Senate for fifty-two years, and who was Vice-Chancellor from 1892 to 1895, from 1896 to 1900, and from 1911 to 1914.

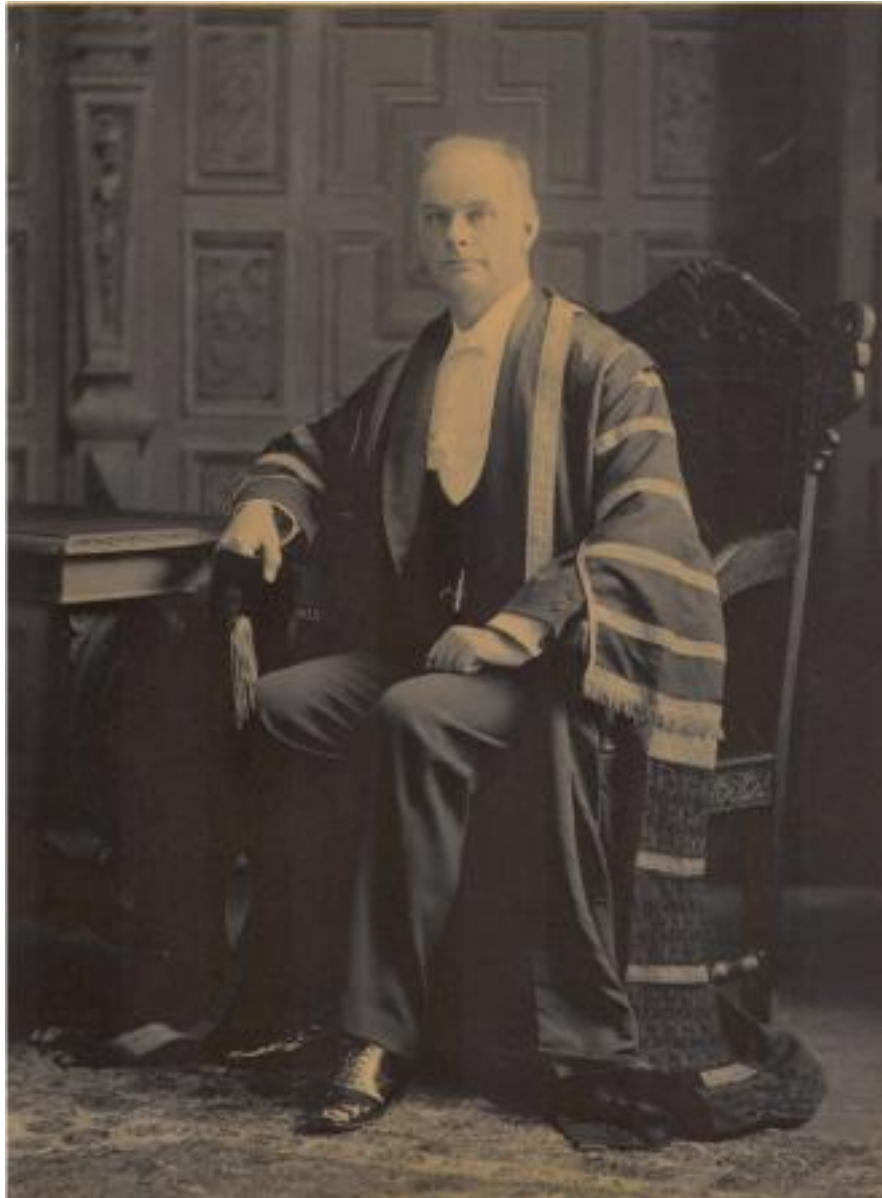
As an undergraduate in the Faculty of Arts, Judge Backhouse had a distinguished course. He graduated in 1872 with First Class Honours in Classics and First Class Honours in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. He became a Master of Arts in 1875.

From his first appearance as a Fellow of the Senate in 1887 until his death in 1939, he showed a keen interest in every phase of University activity, and, during his long period of service, he made countless friends by his many outstanding qualities. His service as a member of the Finance Committee, the Buildings and Grounds Committee, the University Extension Board, the Council of St Paul's College, and on other Committees, was invaluable. He had, throughout his long life, an interest in every part of University life, and none the least was his steadfast support of the undergraduates and of undergraduate life.

He may be named as one of the most loyal supporters of the University of Sydney, and he took pride in its progress for more than half a century. No one, and no one after, can hope to emulate the example given by this great Son of Sydney University.

One of his greatest qualifications was his intimate knowledge of academic procedure, and those who have been fortunate enough to have had association with him for many years realise the greatness and the goodness of the man. His name will live in the history of the University of Sydney as one of the most representative of the ability, learning, and character

that gave the institution whatever claim to greatness its first century may establish. The name of Backhouse will be an inspiration to the generations to come as one who helped in guiding the counsels of the University with the wisdom which gained for him both the admiration and esteem of all its members."



His Honour Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse, *photo G3\_224\_957, University of Sydney Archives.*



'Judge Backhouse's 80th birthday - the senior member of the Senate in his senatorial robes yesterday at Sydney University', *photo from The Sydney Morning Herald, 30 May 1931.*