

## **THE HON SIR ARTHUR RENWICK – FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (1889–91, 1900–02 AND 1906–08)**

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (BA, 1857), the Hon Sir Arthur Renwick, physician, philanthropist and politician, was a Fellow of Senate from 1877 to 1908. He was elected Vice-Chancellor by Senate from 1889 to 1891, 1900 to 1902 and 1906 to 1908.

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### **PROFILE**

(1837 - 1908)

BA Sydney MD Edin

**Fellow of Senate 1877 - 1908, including election by Senate as  
– Vice-Chancellor 1889 - 1891, 1900 - 1902 and 1906 - 1908**

### **His early years**

Arthur Renwick was born on 30 May 1837 at Glasgow, Scotland. On 21 July 1841 he reached Sydney with his parents, bounty immigrants, in the *Helen*. He was educated at the Redfern Grammar School.

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

In 1853, Renwick matriculated as part of the 3rd cohort of students admitted to the University, and was an undergraduate student from 1854 to 1856.

He graduated Bachelor of Arts at the graduation ceremony held in 1857.

### **His career**

Renwick became a physician, philanthropist and politician.

He studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh (MB 1860, MD 1861) and became a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.

After further research courses in Glasgow, London and Paris, in 1862 he returned to Sydney and lived at Redfern where he soon established a growing practice and was skilled in forensic surgery.

### **Highlights of his medical career included:**

- 1862-77, visiting medical officer for the Benevolent Society of New South Wales
- 1866-75, honorary physician at the Sydney Infirmary and Dispensary and medical officer for the Australian Union Benefit Society
- 20 August 1873, appointed to the Medical Board, of which he later became president

- 1870s, director and honorary consulting physician at the Sydney Infirmary and Dispensary; honorary surgeon to the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind; and president in the 1880s
- 1878, president of both the Infirmary and the Benevolent Society
- 1880s, first president of the New South Wales branch of the British Medical Association
- 1890s, director of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, a trustee of the Carrington Centennial Hospital for Convalescents and an honorary physician to the Hospital for Sick Children and the Thirlmere Home for Consumptives.

**Highlights of his political career included:**

- 1879 saw Renwick win the seat of East Sydney at a by-election, which he held until 1882
- 1881-83, Secretary for Mines in the Parkes-Robertson ministry and carried the Ad eundem Degrees Act, an act establishing an anatomy school at the University and the Sydney Hospital Incorporation Act
- 1886-87, represented Redfern and was minister of public instruction under Sir Patrick Jennings
- 1887, appointed to the Legislative Council



The Hon Arthur Renwick in 1886 as Minister for Education in the new Ministry of NSW, *photo from the 'Australian Town and Country Journal', 3 April 1886.*

**Renwick's other achievements included:**

- charitable works, most notably he set the pace in improving conditions at the Benevolent Asylum, especially in standards of care for women and children, and worked for a separate lying-in hospital
- New South Wales commissioner for the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880, a vice-president of the commission for the Amsterdam Exhibition in 1883, vice-president and later president of the commission for the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition in 1887 and a New South Wales representative commissioner at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, in 1893
- associated with various commercial enterprises, including as a director and chairman of the Australian Widows' Fund, Mutual Life Assurance Society and the Industrial Building Society.

He was knighted in 1894.

*from the Australian Dictionary of Biography*



The Hon Sir Arthur Renwick in 1897 as a NSW candidate for the Federal Convention, *photo from the 'Australian Town and Country Journal', 20 February 1897.*

## His membership of Senate

Renwick was a Fellow of Senate of the University of Sydney, elected by a Convocation of electors to fill a vacancy in 1877, and remained on the Senate until 1908.

He was elected Vice-Chancellor 1889-91, 1900-02 and 1906-08.

### Involvement with the University of Sydney included:

- being examiner in medicine of the University of Sydney (1866-75)
- acted as dean of the faculty of medicine on a number of occasions
- donated £1000 in 1877 for a scholarship in natural science "with especial reference to Comparative Anatomy" and told the Chancellor of his great "gratification in being permitted to be the first graduate of the University to give sensible expression to the gratitude I feel for the invaluable benefit conferred on me when a humble student"
- donated the west window of the hall in the Medical School building.



The Hon Sir Arthur Renwick in Senate robes, *photo G3\_224\_0686, University of Sydney Archives*

## **Senate's tribute**

He died at his home at Burwood on 23 November 1908 of heart disease.

The following resolution was passed by the Senate at its meeting on 7 December 1908:

"The Senate desires to place on record its profound regret at the decease of the Hon. Sir Arthur Renwick, BA MD, Kt, formerly Vice-Chancellor and a benefactor of the University of Sydney, and also its deep sympathy with Lady Renwick and the members of the family at their loss. Sir Arthur Renwick was one of the oldest graduates of the University of Sydney, having graduated BA in 1857. As a Fellow of the Senate for a period of 31 years, and as Vice-Chancellor, to which office he had been elected several times, he rendered important and valuable service to the University.

Sir Arthur was a member of the Faculty of Medicine since the year 1873, and had acted as Dean of that Faculty. He gave much time and attention to the affairs of the University, and was held in the highest esteem by his colleagues, by whom his loss will be deeply felt".