



SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON BT – FORMER CHANCELLOR (1854–62) AND VICE-CHANCELLOR (1851–53)

Sir Charles Nicholson Bt was one of the original 16 Fellows of Senate, appointed in 1850 by proclamation of the Governor, and serving until 1883. He was elected Vice-Chancellor (Vice-Provost) by Senate from 1851 to 1853 and Chancellor (Provost) from 1854 to 1862.

PROFILE

(1808 - 1903)

MD *Edin* HonDCL *Oxf* HonLLD *Camb*

Fellow of Senate 1850 - 1883, including election by Senate as

– Vice-Chancellor (Vice-Provost) 1851 - 1853

– Chancellor (Provost) 1854 - 1862

HIS BACKGROUND

Sir Charles Nicholson, born in England, was educated privately by tutors and at the University of Edinburgh where he graduated MD in 1833 and became an extraordinary member of the Hunterian Medical Society of Edinburgh. Later that year, he sailed for Sydney to stay with his uncle Captain James Ascough, a wealthy trader, ship owner and landowner. Nicholson later inherited substantial property from Ascough, which formed the basis of his own fortune.

After practising for several years as a physician in Sydney, Nicholson turned his attention to business interests in shipping and railways and pastoral enterprises. He was also active in the public life of the colony, being a member of the Medical Board throughout the 1840s and appointed a Trustee of both the Savings Bank and Australian Museum in the 1850s. In 1843 he was elected a member of the new part-elective Legislative Council as a representative for Port Phillip. In 1846, he was elected Speaker of the House and was twice re-elected to this office, being acknowledged as a fine speaker and a capable and successful man of business in the colony.

In 1849, he joined W C Wentworth in pressing for the establishment of a university. Nicholson perceived that the natural evolution of education in the colony required a tertiary institution to supplement the existing secondary institutions.

Nicholson returned to live in England in 1862, but remained a Fellow of the Senate until 1883. He also continued to promote the interests of the University in England, acting for 40 years as the University's agent in selecting staff.

Nicholson was an extremely cultured man being profoundly interested in classical studies and ancient history. His collection of manuscripts and antiques was extensive. He was also a generous patron of the arts and sciences. He made periodic additions to the library of the University and to the collection of antiquities which he donated to the University in 1857.

The Nicholson Museum in the University of Sydney and the Nicholson pictures there including Lely's 'Lady in Blue' commemorate his name.

* Title changed to Chancellor in 1860

The biographical notes on the Chancellors contain information derived from a variety of sources including: Australia's First: A History of the University of Sydney; University News; University of Sydney Archives; Lawlink NSW: Law and History.



Sir Charles Nicholson c1865, *photo, photographer Ghemar Freres, Bruxelles, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Digital order number: a4359034.*



Sir Charles Nicholson, *image from 'The Centenary of the Faculty of Medicine'.*



Sir Charles Nicholson in 1887, *image from the 'Australian Town and Country Journal', 10 December 1887, NLA Newspapers.*



A later photo of Sir Charles Nicholson, *G3_224_1778, University of Sydney Archives.*



Sir Charles Nicholson in his home in England after his return in 1862, *photo, University of Sydney Archives.*

HIS MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE

In 1850, he was nominated as a member of the original Senate of the University. The following year, he was elected the first Vice-Provost* and in 1854 he was elected Provost*. As Vice-Provost and later Provost he played a major role in designing Australia's first university. He based his ideas on Oxford and Cambridge but with the provision of greater access to entry than that which characterised those universities. Nicholson also played an important role in the acceptance of the architectural plans of Edmund Blacket for the University. On a trip to England in 1857, he gained considerable recognition for the University and a Royal Charter (1857) giving its degrees equal status with those of British universities.

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Charles Nicholson, *portrait by Artist H W Phillips, oil on canvas; Purchased by Subscribers 1850; University Art Collection, reproduced with the permission of the University of Sydney.*



View of the inner room of the Museum of Antiquities, which was established in 1860 when Sir Charles Nicholson presented his valuable collection of antiquities to the University, *photo, courtesy of the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney.*

SENATE'S TRIBUTE

The Senate reports, with great regret, the death, in November, 1903, of Sir Charles Nicholson, Bart., M.D., D.C.L., a gentleman whose influence upon the University has been of the highest value to the community. Upon the receipt of a notification from the Agent-General of his death, the following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Senate:-

The Senate of the University desires to place on record its sense of the loss sustained by the University through the death of Sir Charles Nicholson, Bart., M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., and of the inestimable value of his services to the University during the fifty-three years which have elapsed from its foundation. As Speaker of the Legislative Council of New South Wales during the passage of the Act of Incorporation of the University, in 1850; as the first Vice-Chancellor of the University, in 1851; as Chancellor, from 1854 to 1862; and as a Fellow of the Senate, from 1851 until 1883, he devoted his best energies to fostering the development of the University. The Nicholson Museum of Antiquities, the valuable books, tapestries and other works of art which he presented to the University, are monuments of his learning, his generosity, and his zealous desire for the elevation of his fellow countrymen.

That a copy of the above resolution be forwarded to Lady Nicholson, together with an expression of the sympathy of the Fellows, with her in her bereavement.

From the Report of the Senate for the year ended 31st December 1903