



THE HON SIR WILLIAM PORTUS CULLEN KCMG – FORMER CHANCELLOR (1914–34) AND VICE-CHANCELLOR (1909–11)

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (BA 1880, MA 1882, LLB 1885 and LLD 1887), the Hon Sir William Portus Cullen KCMG was a Fellow of Senate from 1896 to 1934, Vice-Chancellor from 1909 to 1911 and Chancellor from 1914 to 1934.

PROFILE

(1855 – 1935)

KCMG, MA LLD *Sydney*

Fellow of Senate 1896 - 1934, including election by Senate as

– Vice-Chancellor 1909 - 1911

– Chancellor 1914 - 1934

His early years

William Portus Cullen was born near Jamberoo in New South Wales. He attended a school in nearby Kiama, but it was only after he moved to Sydney at the age of 20 that the opportunity for further education arose.

His student days at the University of Sydney

Professor Charles Badham persuaded him to sit for a scholarship to the University. He was successful and graduated BA in 1880 with first class honours in classics, having been awarded other prizes and scholarships during his course. He then went on to graduate MA in 1882, LLB in 1885 and LLD in 1887.

His career

Cullen was admitted to the Bar in 1883 and established a substantial practice, specialising in real property and equity.

He was a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1891-94 and the Legislative Council from 1895-1910.



Dr Cullen in 1897, *photo, Australian Town and Country Journal, 20 February 1897, National Library of Australia.*

Cullen was a strong nationalist and advocate of the Australian Federation. He was an adviser to (Sir) George Reid when the agreement on Federation was reached in 1899.

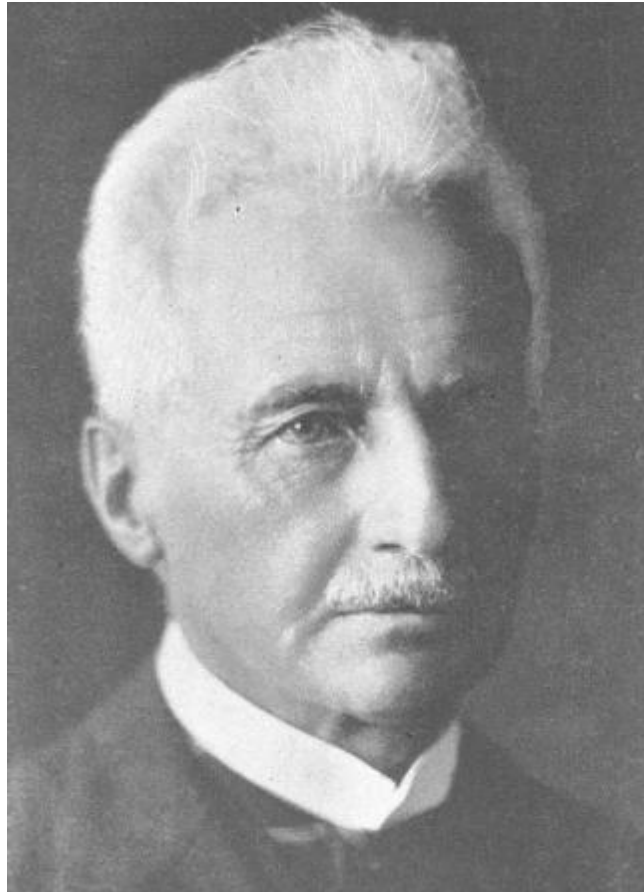
Cullen's career at the Bar thrived after the opening of the High Court of Australia. He was appointed King's Counsel in 1905 and was recognised as being in the first ranking of barristers practising there.

In 1910, he was appointed Chief Justice of New South Wales and served in the position until his retirement in 1925.

Knighthood in 1911, he was appointed KCMG in 1912.



Dr Cullen, Chief Justice of NSW, 1910, *photo, The Sydney Mail, 19 January 1910, Google News Archive.*



William Portus Cullen in 1920, *photo G3_224_1425, University of Sydney Archives.*

He served as Lieutenant-Governor of NSW from 1928 until 1930.



The Swearing-in ceremony of Sir William Cullen as Lieutenant-Governor of NSW, which was held in the Executive Council Chamber on 24 August 1928, *photo, The Sydney Morning Herald, 25 August 1928, National Library of Australia.*



This portrait in oils of the former Chief Justice, by Mr Norman Carter, was unveiled on 28 July 1930 in No 1 Jury Court by the Attorney-General (Mr Boyce KC), *photo, The Sydney Morning Herald, 29 July 1930, National Library of Australia.*

He died in April 1935 in his eightieth year and was given a state funeral.

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; and Lawlink NSW: Law and History.

His membership of Senate

Cullen was elected as a Fellow of the Senate of the University in 1896. He served as Vice-Chancellor from 1908-11 and Chancellor from 1914-34, a record term at the time.

In addition, he was acting Dean of the Faculty of Law in 1897.



Chancellor William Portus Cullen on the far left and Sir Mungo MacCallum (Vice-Chancellor 1924-28) on the far right, 1920s, *photo, Hood Collection, Mitchell Pictures, State Library of NSW.*



Sir William Portus Cullen (3rd from left) with (from left) Professor John Cadell Windeyer, Vice-Chancellor Sir Robert Wallace and the Hon F Anstey at the opening of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in 1930, *photo G3_224_0628, University of Sydney Archives.*



A photo by Sam Hood taken at the University on ANZAC Day 1930 when several hundred people gathered in the University grounds to hear a carillon recital. An Army Chaplain and a General are at the front, with Chancellor Cullen standing behind wearing his Chancellor's robes and Sir Mungo MacCallum next to him, his face visible between the Chaplain and the General. Dr J C Bradfield is on the extreme right, *photo, Mitchell Library of New South Wales, Digital order number: hood_04998.*



At the University Reunion Dinner held in the Union Refectory on 19 May 1930, from left, Professor R Wallace, Miss Snyder, the Lieutenant Governor (Sir William Cullen), Dr F W Bayldon, and Sir John Peden, *photo, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', 20 May 1930, National Library of Australia.*



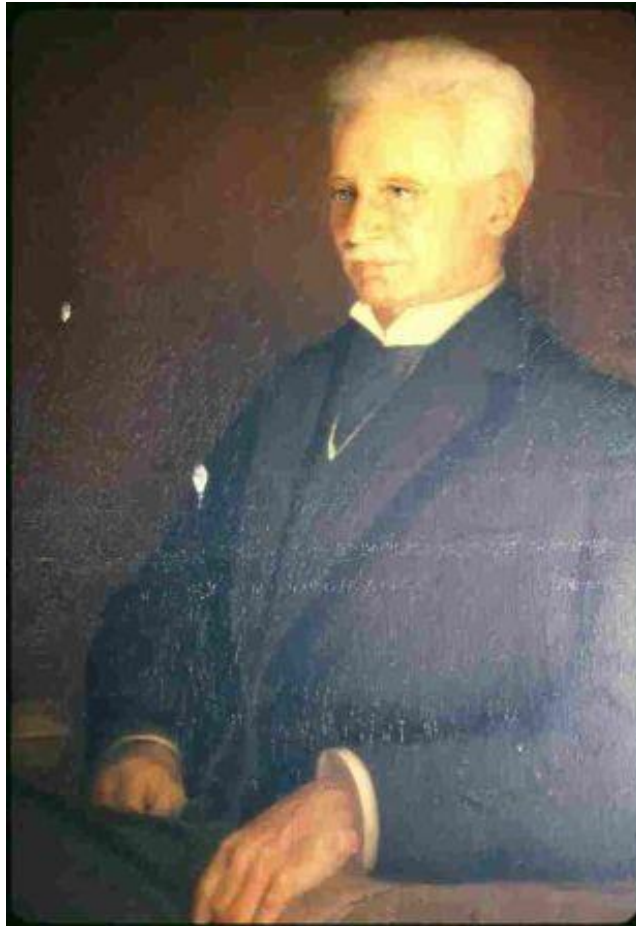
On League of Nations Day at the University on 27 August 1931, from left: Sir Philip Game, Sir William Cullen, Sir Phillip Street and Professor Francis Anderson, of the League of Nations Union (speaking) in the Great Hall, *photo, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', 28 August 1931, National Library of Australia.*



Sir William Cullen addressing the Sydney University Settlement annual meeting at Chippendale on 5 May 1933, *photo, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', 6 May 1933, National Library of Australia.*



Chancellor the Hon Sir William Portus Cullen greets His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester before the ceremony to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws *ad eundem gradum* upon the Duke, on 23 November 1934, *photo, Hood collection, State Library of New South Wales, HA 354.*



Portrait of the Hon Sir William Portus Cullen KCMG by Jerrold Nathan (1899-1979), oil on canvas, *University Art Collection*, reproduced with the kind permission of Ms Felicity Brierley and the University of Sydney.

Senate's tribute on his retirement

The following resolution was adopted at the regular meeting of the Senate in December 1934, on his retirement:

"On the retirement of Sir William Cullen, KCMG, the Senate desires to record its warm appreciation of his faithful and distinguished service during the long period of the 38 years that he has been a Fellow of the Senate and the 20 that he has been Chancellor.

It sincerely regrets that his health compels him to sever his official connection with the University, which he has loved so well, and in the life of which he has taken so large and influential a share, a share that will long be gratefully remembered by all who have had the privilege of benefiting by his guidance.

It hopes that he may be spared many years to enjoy his well-earned and honourable leisure after a career of such public usefulness to the University and the State."

Senate's tribute on his death

In May 1935, the Senate adopted the following resolution in regard to the death of the Honourable Sir William Cullen:

"The Senate records its deep regret at the death of its former Chancellor, the Honourable Sir William Cullen; it reveres his memory, and expresses appreciation of the many great services he rendered to the University; and it offers its sincere sympathy to the members of his family on his passing.

Sir William Cullen died on Saturday, 6th April, at his home at Leura in his eightieth year. He was an outstanding figure among Australians, having had a long, active and distinguished career. After a brilliant career at the Bar, he filled the high offices of Lieutenant-Governor of the State from 1910 to 1930, Chief Justice of New South Wales from 1910 to 1925, and Chancellor of the University from 1914 to 1934. He was created a Knight Bachelor in 1911 and Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George in 1912.

His active interest in the University extended over more than half a century dating from his student days. He was elected a Fellow of the Senate in 1896 and Vice-Chancellor in 1908. His name stands in a prominent position on the roll of those who have been responsible for the great progress of the educational system of the State during the last half century.

During his term as Chancellor, the University developed in a marked degree, and his re-election term after term was evidence of his great knowledge and wise counsel.

The Government of the State, with a desire to show respect to the memory of so distinguished a citizen, arranged a State funeral, which was held on Tuesday, 9th April."