THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL PLUNKETT LECTURE

'The Law or Billy Hughes?': Marriage, Divorce & Religion in First World War Australia

PROGRAMME

Lecturer:	**Associate Professor Catherine Bond UNSW Law & Justice**
Chair:	**Daniel Yazdani – Barrister, Forbes Society Advisory Board member**
Date:	**Tuesday 17 November 2026**
Time:	**5.30pm – 6.30pm**
Venue:	**Banco Court, Level 13 Law Courts Building, Queen's Square, Sydney**

CONTEXT: The J.H. Plunkett Lecture is an annual Lecture to honour the memory of one of the State's pivotal Attorneys General. John Hubert Plunkett (1802-1869) arrived in NSW, from Ireland, in 1832. For more than 30 years thereafter he made a major contribution to colonial law and society, serving, inter alia, as Solicitor General and Attorney General. He was the first Australian lawyer to be granted a commission as Queen's Counsel. He led Roger Therry, another Irish-born barrister, in the conduct of the Myall Creek Murder trials.

ORDER OF EVENTS

1. **WELCOME** – by Daniel Yazdani, Barrister 13th Floor St James Hall Chambers, Forbes Society Advisory Board member

2. **PRESENTATION OF THE LECTURE** – by Associate Professor Catherine Bond

3. **THANKS and CLOSE OF PROCEEDINGS** – by the Chair

THE FORBES LECTURER

Associate Professor Catherine Bond researches on the intersection between law and history in Australia, including intellectual property histories and the relationship between law and war. She has published widely in leading Australian and internationally-based law journals on topics ranging from Crown copyright, to plain packaging of tobacco products, to the introduction of a patent system in the Game of Thrones world of Westeros. Catherine's book Law in War: Freedom and Restriction in Australia During the Great War, was published by NewSouth Publishing in April 2020.

ABSTRACT: How far should law extend into the private sphere in times of war? During the First World War, an 'axis of legal' – Prime Minister and Attorney-General William Hughes; Solicitor-General Sir Robert Garran; and Minister for Defence Senator George Foster Pearce – experienced few limits on their wielding of the law to intrude into all areas of Australian life. This talk focuses on three aspects – marriage, divorce and religion – to demonstrate the breadth of this use. How did Hughes seek to become a legal Cupid, facilitating marriage by proxy as a cure for the loss of marriageable men overseas? Why can Hughes, for better or worse, be considered a forefather of modern divorce law? What was the community's tolerance for the prosecution of men of religion, for statements made at the pulpit? This talk sheds new light on and explores novel stories from one of the busiest periods in Australian legal history.

FORBES SOCIETY LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

Lectures and legal history tutorials convened by the Forbes Society are generally open to the public, without charge. The Forbes Society's annual programme of legal history tutorials has, since its inception in 2013, included presentations by senior judges, academics, members of the Bar and Court staff. Presentations this year include:

10 Feb 2026 Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM, Occasional Lecture "The origin of the doctrine of mutual wills" combined with presentations to the 2025 Essayists

18 Feb 2026 Professor Paul P Miller (Notre Dame Law School) Legal history tutorial "Political Trust, Public Justification and Judicial Office"

3 March 2026 Professor Prue Vines (Faculty of Law, UNSW) Legal history tutorial "The history of Australian treatment of Aboriginal Customary law with particular reference to Succession Law"

31 March 2026 Professor Fleur Johns (Dean and Head of School, The University of Sydney Law School) Legal history tutorial "A Short Legal Prehistory of the Foreign Policy of the Second Trump Administration"

30 April 2026 Associate Professor Alecia Simmonds (University of Technology Sydney) Legal history tutorial, exploring themes emerging from her published book, 'Courting: An Intimate History of Love and the Law'

7 May 2026 Dr Paula Jane Byrne (Western Sydney University) Legal history tutorial 'Law in the New Democracy'

8 Sep 2026 Associate Professor Raynor Thwaites (University of Sydney) Legal history tutorial "Additional punishment for naturalized Australians? Migrant protest and legal reform in the late 1950s"

If you have any queries about attending or presenting, please advise the Secretary of the Society (Dr Simon Chapple SC) or the Treasurer (Carol Webster SC) at secretariat@forbessociety.org.au.

PRIOR JH PLUNKETT LECTURES: Last year's Plunkett Lecture was given on 23 October 2025 by the then Solicitor General for NSW, Michael Sexton SC, titled "The Model of a Modern Solicitor General".

FORBES LECTURES: The Forbes Society, and the annual Forbes Lecture sponsored by the Society, are named for Francis Forbes (1784-1841), the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW, 1824-1837. He was knighted in 1837.

This year's Forbes Lecture was delivered on 14 October 2026 by Emerita Professor Pauline Ridge (ANU College of Law, Governance and Policy), in Banco Court.

Last year's Annual Forbes Lecture was given on 22 July 2025 by Professor Kathy Bowrey of the Faculty of Law UNSW, in Banco Court, titled "The Diva, her Lover and the Recording Company scheme to 'get Melba': Introducing Dame Nellie Melba (1861-1931), the business woman," chaired by Professor Mark Lunney (Junior Vice President).

JOINT PRESENTATIONS WITH THE NGARA YURA COMMITTEE OF THE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF NSW: The Joint presentation on 19 May 2026 explored current *Towards Truth* subjects: contemporary policing and criminal offences, and the present work on historical policing. Towards Truth is a partnership between the Indigenous Law Centre and the Justice and Equity Centre. The event was chaired by the Hon. Justice Phillip Boulten, Supreme Court of NSW and Ngara Yura Committee member, who introduced presenters/ panellists Anna Harding (Project Director of Towards Truth), Jonathan Hunyor (CEO of the Justice and Equity Centre), Shane Phillips (CEO Tribal Warrior) and Kate Sinclair (Solicitor, Strategic Litigation, Justice and Equity Centre).

THE FORBES FUND: One of the Society's objects is to encourage and promote research into Australian legal history and it maintains for that purpose the Francis Forbes Fund, to which donations may be made. Donations to the Forbes Fund (in the sum of $2.00 or more) are tax deductible. As well as specific projects each year, the Society supports an annual Essay prize awarded for the best presentation by a higher degree research student or an early career researcher at the Annual ANZLHS conference. This paper may be published in *law&history*. Recent grants from the Fund have included:

(2026 grants): *Adelaide University* Associate Professor Sylvia Villios, *Law reform, Legal memory and Public Participation in South Australia*

Flinders University Dr Rowan Nicholson, *The Unconquered Desert: The Law of Sovereignty and Invasion in Australia 1606–2026*

University of Melbourne Antonia Smith, *Historical relationship between indigenous settlor law in Aotearoa New Zealand*

University of New South Wales Dr Zoe Smith *Coercive Control and 'Mental Cruelty' in Queensland, 1890-1975*

University of Sydney Dr Rosemary Grey (Co-Director, Sydney Centre for International Law), *Embedding 'Indigenous perspectives' in international law-making: Australia's role in the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity treaty negotiations* :

Dr Ben Mostyn, *Australia, the United Nations, and a History of Global Drug Policy*

(2025 grants): *Australian National University* Dr Paula Byrne's book with ANU Press, "Law in the New Democracy", which has as its subject the criminal courts of the 1850s;

University of Melbourne Dr Lucinda O'Brien, 'Evolution of Australian bankruptcy law from the mid-1800s';

Australian National University Dr Laura L. Dawes, 'Slip! Slop! Sue! A history of tax litigation and skin cancer activism';

University of New England Ben Hingley, 'Martial law in the pre-Federation colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and Van Diemen's Land';

University of Southern Queensland Dr Rhett Martin, 'Historical review of the circumstances of the 1891 conviction and imprisonment of 10 striking shearers for conspiracy.'

We welcome all further donations to enable us to support such worthy projects – provision for donations is made on the membership form.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORBES SOCIETY: Membership of the Forbes Society is open to everybody. A 2026-27 membership form can be downloaded from the Society's website forbessociety.org.au. Benefits of membership include timely notification of legal history events via updates emailed to members from time to time.