



**Trinity College**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

*Finding the Way*

*The Sir Albert Coates Oration,  
University of Ballarat*

A speech by Professor Robin Sharwood, AM,  
27 September 2002

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## **Prefatory Note and Abstract**

The Sir Albert Coates Oration at the University of Ballarat honours one of Ballarat's most distinguished sons. Born in 1895, he became one of Australia's leading surgeons, a pioneer in the area of neuro-surgery. He had a long association with the University of Melbourne. As a very young man, he served in the First World War (Gallipoli and the Western Front) and, at the age of 46, volunteered for service in the Second World War. Captured by the Japanese, he became one of the hero-surgeons on the infamous Burma-Thai Railway. He was knighted in 1955 and died in 1977. The Oration is sponsored by the Albert Coates Memorial Trust.

This speech examines the present state of Australia's Universities, arguing that they are in serious danger of 'losing the way'. It defends the foundational concept of 'liberal education' and urges all Universities to promote at least a measure of 'elitism' in pursuance of that end. Coates himself is quoted, and a crucial episode from his early life is examined to demonstrate that, even when the way has been lost, it can be found again.

***Finding the Way***  
***The Sir Albert Coates Oration,***  
***University of Ballarat***

**A speech by Professor Robin Sharwood, AM,  
27 September 2002**

It is a very great honour to be invited to deliver the Oration established at this University to mark the life and work of my kinsman and one of Ballarat's most distinguished sons, Albert Ernest Coates.

Last year's Oration, as befitted the inaugural Oration of the series, was largely biographical: it focussed on Coates himself, his life and career. While I, too, want to say something about the man himself, especially the young Albert Coates, it is my intention, or at least my hope, my desire, to link his life to a larger theme. That theme I have indicated in the title I have given to tonight's address: 'Finding the Way'.

Let me begin with a verse from a well-loved poem:

'Who would true valour see  
Let him come hither.  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
Shall make him once relent  
His first avowed intent  
To be a pilgrim.'

Yes, we all know it, most of us as a hymn: the strong, punchy lines which the incomparable John Bunyan put into the mouth of Valiant-for-Truth in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Notice what it is that Mr Valiant-for-Truth dedicates himself to in this confident and colourful poem. It is not riches or happiness or honour or long life, or any of the more obvious of human goals. He dedicates himself to a process—to a quest, a search, a kind of deliberate and purposeful adventure. His goal is 'to be a pilgrim'. His determination is to 'find the way'. 'Finding the way'—'finding the *right* way'—is, to him, the all-important priority. To this, he is prepared to devote all his intelligence and energy. For this, he is ready to face all obstacles. The pilgrimage, of course, does have its own goal—'He knows he at the end shall life inherit', Bunyan writes. But Bunyan is not primarily concerned with what lies beyond that final river, when all the trumpets shall have sounded. His focus is on the journey to the river—the pilgrimage,

the quest, the adventure. His is a story of ‘finding the way’.

So that is what I should like to speak about tonight: ‘Finding the way’.

It is an important subject for all sorts of reasons, not least because the process of ‘finding the way’ carries the risk of ‘losing the way’. The pilgrim can stumble. And that experience can be either disastrous or ultimately redemptive.

It is in this regard that the early life of Albert Ernest Coates can be so instructive. But that is a story which I shall relate and reflect upon at the end of this address.

We are here tonight at a University—at, indeed, the very ‘University of Ballarat’ which Coates himself had hoped to see established, urging such a move in a public speech here in 1963.<sup>1</sup>

And universities are very much involved in ‘finding the way’, at various levels of their being. They are amongst the pilgrim institutions of our culture, ever questing, ever searching, ever engaged in high and purposeful adventure.

At least, that is what we hope they are. Presently, as now for some years, a great debate is in progress in this country (but elsewhere as well) as to just what it is that universities are on about. The Commonwealth Minister responsible for higher education, Dr. Brendan Nelson, has in the last few months released no less than seven papers on the future of tertiary studies in this country; and these are but the latest in a stream of inquiries and reports, official and unofficial, which take us back through the mouldbreaking Dawkin’s ‘reforms’ of 1988-1989 (if that is what they were) to what many of the older generation (to which I now belong) regard as the most radical and most beneficial of them all, the Murray Report of 1957.

This report on Australian universities, commissioned in 1956 by the Menzies government, led to the first major injection of Federal funds into the higher education sector, and saved the universities from financial disaster. Menzies himself insisted on the full implementation of all Sir Keith Murray’s recommendations, as indeed did Albert Coates, again publicly,<sup>2</sup> and Menzies, rightly, regarded this development as amongst his greatest achievements.

In 1955, there were only 31,000 University students in Australia; ten years later, thanks to the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme (introduced in 1951) and the Murray reforms, there were 83,000—nearly three times as many. But it was not just a matter of numbers, which in themselves prove nothing. The Menzian reforms of the 1950s brought stability, confidence and enhanced intellectual depth to a system which was faltering badly. It had begun so well, with first-class appointments to the foundation Universities of Sydney and Melbourne a century before, but it had been

<sup>1</sup> *The Courier*, 28 September 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Syme Memorial Lecture, Royal College of Surgeons, Melbourne 1959 (MS).

dealt terrible blows by the financial disasters of the 1890s, the loss of nearly a whole generation of potential scholars in the First World War, the overwhelming emphasis on ‘business’ in the 1920s (‘The business of America is business’, said the ‘20s American President Calvin Coolidge, and there were plenty who echoed him here), the Great Depression of the 1930s and the grim austerity of the Second World War and the years which immediately followed that War. By 1950, the Australian university system was on its knees, near collapse or, at the very least, condemned to prolonged mediocrity. It had lost the way. Thanks to the Menzian reforms—and I do not hesitate to attach his name to them, especially bearing in mind Menzies’ strong Ballarat links (his early schooling was here)—the Australian universities had found the way again. They were back on track.

But just what was that track? Were they finding the *right* way? That is the question which has haunted all the more recent inquiries. Indeed, it could be said that it has haunted the Australian higher educational system from its beginnings.

The first University to be established in this country was that of Sydney, founded in 1850 by Act of Parliament. There was intense debate in the New South Wales Legislative Council as to whether it was necessary (some thought ‘that a Grammar-school liberally endowed would be of greater service’<sup>1</sup>), whether it should be wholly secular, and what its real function should be. W.C. Wentworth, its principal protagonist, saw that function in terms of its potential within a developing colonial society. ‘He took it’, the report of his 1849 speech in the Legislative Council reads, ‘that the self-government they were searching for, would be a useless boon, without the educational advantages which this measure proffered. How many of the native youth were there at present fitted to become the ministers of the wants of this country?...The native youth of the country could not now obtain the education which would fit them for high offices in the state; and this, he contended, was a state of things not to be endured, which was derogatory to the colony, and must be put an end to.’ Wentworth even hinted that a University must become a ‘necessary and component part’ of any movement towards colonial federation.<sup>2</sup>

In Melbourne, busy establishing its own colonial structures following the separation of Victoria from New South Wales in 1851, I doubt if Wentworth’s federal appeal carried much weight in its own debate on the establishment of a University, again achieved by Act of Parliament in 1853. Indeed, there was no equivalent in Melbourne to the quite serious wrangling that had preceded the Sydney decision, largely because the establishment of a University in Sydney had made a similar development in Melbourne virtually inevitable. There was said to be no public opposition to the idea, and certainly no member opposed it in the Victorian Legislative Council. Some echoed Wentworth’s arguments that a University would help to prepare the colony for

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<sup>1</sup> C.M.H. Clark (ed.) *Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955, p 695.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 697.

responsible government, by training up the native-born.<sup>1</sup> What is striking about both the Sydney and Melbourne debates, at least as I read them, is the emphasis on advanced education, on a university education, as a good in itself—advanced education across a range of disciplines from the traditional classics and mathematics through the arts and sciences to the senior vocational disciplines such as law and medicine. ‘The main object of the Bill’, said W.C. Wentworth in 1849, ‘was to advance the cause of education...He looked upon this measure as more important than all that they had heretofore done in that house. They had passed laws, but these laws might be altered...but this measure—this, which was to enlighten the mind—to refine the understanding and to elevate the soul of their fellow-man—this, of all their acts, alone contained the germ of immortality.’<sup>2</sup> In more prosaic 20<sup>th</sup> Century language, your former Chancellor, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, commenting on the foundation of Melbourne’s University, wrote: ‘To the liberals a university was one of the vital institutions of western civilization, which cultivated the intellect and taste and taught men to love knowledge for its own sake. In addition to these secular aims the founders believed that a university was a moral force...’<sup>3</sup>

That vision of a University, as providing what has often been summed up as a ‘liberal education’, held sway for a very long time. Half a century after its foundation, the 1904 Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne was still able to conclude, quite simply, that the ‘chief object’ of the University ‘is to educate.’<sup>4</sup> As I say, this was seen as a good in itself—as something which barely required elaboration, let alone justification.

That, I know, is how Coates saw it. An omnivorous reader in at least three languages since boyhood, he loved learning for its own sake. Inspired by the Murray Report of 1957, he publicly urged the enlargement and duplication of Melbourne’s universities so that Melbourne might become a great cultural centre with an influence for good through Asia, from which it should seek to attract many students—a remarkable anticipation of that ‘internationalisation’ of Australian universities which was to occur nearly fifty years later.<sup>5</sup> Ballarat, he argued in 1963, was a natural site for another university because of what he called its ‘cultural heritage and tradition of learning’. The expansion of the School of Mines was admirable in itself, he said, but the time had come when the thinking should be bigger.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this period of well over one hundred years—to speak of this country alone—it was taken for granted that training for a job, for money-making, was *not* a primary objective of a university, even if it might be, for many graduates, an incidental outcome. Even the historic vocational disciplines of law and medicine, which had

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<sup>1</sup> G. Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, MUP, 1957, p 4.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, pp 696, 698.

<sup>3</sup> Blainey, pp 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, p 699.

<sup>5</sup> Rotary Conference, Lorne, as reported in *The Sun*, 8 April 1957.

<sup>6</sup> Address to Ballarat sub-branch of the AMA and reported in *The Courier*, 28 September 1963.

indeed been the origins of many an ancient European university, were not seen in these terms. They were vocations—that was the whole point: *learned* vocations. As Coates said to medical graduates at a Melbourne conferring ceremony in 1970: ‘Remember you follow a calling and do not ply a trade’.<sup>1</sup> Nor was the merit of a university to be measured by what it contributed to the economy.

I am old-fashioned enough to believe that that original and long-held liberal vision of the role of universities was correct, at least in its essence. Of course institutions must and do evolve, and that evolution may reshape them in ways which their founders would never have dreamt of. But if that evolution, that reshaping, results, in the case of universities at least, in a betrayal of the original and foundational vision, or even a very substantial downgrading of it, then I am bound to say that I think the universities have lost their way. And that, I fear, is what has happened in this country, or is very close to happening—as you will hear, I do not accept that the situation is beyond retrieval.

I would focus on two developments in particular, which have both contributed to and are symptomatic of a larger malaise.

In the first place, there has been a very substantial reduction in government funding to Australian universities. For various historical reasons, it is hard to quantify this in any single, readily understandable, formula, but the fact is not in doubt. And here are three indicators.

The peak year seems to have been 1977-1978, when government funding reached \$3 billion (in 1989-90 dollar values); it has never reached that level again, although student numbers have more than doubled since.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1983 and the year 2000, Commonwealth funding per higher education student (‘actual EFTSU’) declined by 12%.<sup>3</sup>

In the words of a Senate Inquiry of 2001, ‘Since 1996 expenditure on higher education as a proportion of Commonwealth outlays has...decreased: from 3.6% to 2.42%, reflecting a Government strategy of reducing its contribution to the funding of higher education’.<sup>4</sup> Referring to that same period, another report of the year 2000 commented: ‘Since 1996, at a time when other nations have been ramping up their investment in universities and research, Australia has been doing the opposite.’<sup>5</sup>

What we have witnessed, and I think it is nothing short of tragic, is an undoing of the

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<sup>1</sup> MS.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Simon Marginson’s Submission to the 2001 Senate Inquiry, *Universities in Crisis*.

<sup>3</sup> AVCC, *Key Statistics on Higher Education*, Sept 2001, p 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Universities in Crisis*, p 34.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Group of Eight’, *Imperatives and Principles of Policy Reform in Australian Higher Education*, August 2000, p 10.

funding reforms of the 1950s which followed the Murray Report: more than their undoing—a complete abandonment of their guiding philosophy.

It is now a matter of open government policy that universities should find for themselves, from fees and elsewhere, an ever-growing proportion of the funds they need in order to survive and grow. As in this country at least (as compared, say, with the United States of America), there are limits to what can be expected from private philanthropy (although no doubt we can do better), universities are expected to go out into the market-place and make money—and not just from fees: they are expected to become ‘businesses’. Somebody remarked to me recently: ‘It’s one thing to expect universities to be *business-like*. That’s fair enough. It’s quite another thing, however, to expect them to become *businesses*.’ I entirely agree. And yet, sadly, that is what is happening. At every level—the university as a whole, the Faculty, the Department, the course—the emphasis is more and more on what revenues the university and that Faculty, that Department, that course can generate, whether from fees or from contracts. As an inevitable consequence, Deans and departmental heads (but especially Deans) have become managers, and Vice-Chancellors little more than corporate CEOs. As I have seen with my own eyes, Faculty meetings and departmental meetings, once at the front of university decision-making, have declined in importance almost to the point of irrelevance. Bottom-line financial number-crunching has become the name of the game. We are a very long way indeed from that Royal Commission finding of 1904 that the ‘chief object’ of a university ‘is to educate’. We have, in short, lost the way, or are perilously close to doing so.

For my second example I would take the so-called ‘Dawkins reforms’ of the late 1980s—that is, the changes to Australia’s higher education system introduced by the Hawke Federal Government when Mr John Dawkins was the relevant Minister.

Prior to this Federal intervention, Australia had developed a so-called ‘binary system’ of post-secondary education—that is, a system in which there were two component parts, conceived as fulfilling different roles. The universities of the day comprised one such part—universities which still, by and large, conformed to the original ideal: providing a ‘liberal education’. The other part was comprised of a variety of institutions all of which, in one way or another, were given over to practical training of a trade or vocational kind: teachers’ colleges, institutes of technology (by whatever name), institutes for para-medical training of various kinds, and a number of other specialised schools.

The Dawkins ‘reform’—more appropriately, perhaps, the Dawkins ‘revolution’—was to force the two component parts into one, partly by a series of amalgamations, partly by simple ‘up-grading’, and to call *all* the institutions which emerged from that process ‘universities’, with the result that we now have 37 publicly funded ‘universities’ in this country as compared with 14 in 1986.

But it is not so much the increase in numbers that worries me as the damage that the

Dawkins revolution has done to the original image of a ‘university’. In the old days, the second component part of the ‘binary system’ was always, by its very nature, associated with the market place, and rightly so—that is not meant as a criticism. That was its *raison d’être*. The terrible logic of Dawkins is that *all* universities are now associated with the market place. When that consequence is allied with the drastic decline in government funding to which I have already referred, and reinforces its consequences, the end result is bleak indeed.

As I say, if we have not yet ‘lost the way’ we are dangerously close to doing so.

I realise that I am here treading on delicate ground, in that it could be said that this University is a ‘Dawkins’ university, because the Ballarat College of Advanced Education was created a University in 1994, in what looks like a typical Dawkins style make-over. But the history of this University, as many here will know better than I, is far more complex. It is not my intention to relate that history tonight, but we should note that there has been an unbroken tradition of tertiary education in Ballarat since 1870, when the famous Ballarat School of Mines was established; that that School was formally affiliated with the University of Melbourne from 1887 to 1894, as, one hundred years later, was the Ballarat College of Advanced Education; and that the whole cluster of tertiary, cultural and intellectual institutions founded here in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century pointed to the certain emergence at some point of a University of Ballarat, based on these institutions, long before Mr Dawkins appeared over the horizon. The University of Ballarat, in other words, was no hasty make-over job, but the product of nearly 130 years of steady, imaginative and high-minded local endeavour.

Perhaps the most telling symbol of the significance of that long history, and its ultimate and (I would say) inevitable conclusion, was that the celebrated and colourful Supreme Court Judge, Sir Redmond Barry, the prime founder of the University of Melbourne and its first Chancellor from 1853 until his death in 1880, was also a prime founder of the School of Mines, giving the inaugural address at its opening ceremony in 1870, and serving for six years as the first President of its Council—in effect, as its Chancellor. Barry’s backing, his active patronage and leadership as the Colony’s pre-eminent man of culture and letters, meant that the stamp of a university, if not the actual name, was on the School of Mines from the beginning.

I have contended, over-simplistically perhaps, because of constraints of time, that our universities have lost the way, or at least are in grave danger of doing so.

But I have also said that I do not regard the situation as irretrievable. It is not merely that I am well aware that good teaching and good research are still to be found in our universities. Fortunately, that clearly remains true. It is, rather, that I can envisage a structural change, based on ideas already current in the Australian university scene, which would, I believe, have the potential to turn the situation around and put the universities back on track—pursuing, once again, the right way. This structural

change—to the system as a whole, and within individual universities—would build upon the recognition of elitism.

Unfortunately, this word ‘elite’ is often used pejoratively, to denote snobbishness or anti-democratic sentiments. But its primary and perfectly proper meaning is not at all pejorative. To quote the primary definition of ‘elite’ as given in the *Macquarie Dictionary*, the word means ‘the choice or best part, as of a body or class of persons’. It is in that sense that I am using the word.

Of course, the concept of the elite university is not new. It has been around for a very long time. Coates himself discreetly advocated the development of elite universities in Australia as long ago as 1970, in a Graduation Address at Melbourne University. ‘Australians’, he said, ‘tend to think of standards, the average Jack is as good as his Head Master. Older countries have long ago adopted methods of cultivating an “elite”’, citing such Universities as Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard.<sup>1</sup> And, unofficially, the concept of the elite is already part of our university system, with the so-called ‘Group of Eight’ major and (for the most part) older universities claiming an elite position, for which they would like to see more open public and governmental recognition. I think they are right to do so, and right to hope, to expect, that more generous government funding in one form or another would follow such recognition. As Justice Michael Kirby has recently said, Australia needs ‘elite institutions with world-class teaching and research’.<sup>2</sup>

But I would extend the concept of elitism to *all* universities. Certainly not every university can aspire to be elite across the board, as it were: that is always likely to be the privilege, the responsibility, of the few, at least within the borders of any one country. Surely, however, *every* university can select one or two areas which it will deliberately develop along elite lines, well-funded by government, and designed to attract teachers, researchers and students of the highest calibre, both regionally, nationally and internationally—elite faculties, elite departments, elite associated institutions, which *can* conform to the older university liberal ideal. To some extent, the present research grants scheme implicitly recognises this, but I should like to see it more openly acknowledged. No doubt, if there is to be special government funding for such elite structures, there will need to be some national authority for accrediting and monitoring purposes, but I see no difficulty there in principle. And no doubt there are many other practical issues which would demand careful attention, such as student selection, fee structures, the provision of scholarships, research grants and other forms of individual financial support, and so on. It is not my intention to explore such matters tonight. What I want to do tonight is simply to promote the general concept, as at least one way of returning our university system to the right paths.

Dr Nelson has entitled his present review ‘Higher Education at the Crossroads’. Yes,

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<sup>1</sup> MS.

<sup>2</sup> *The Age*, 22 June 2002.

it *is* at the crossroads, and we must do our best to ensure that it chooses its future path well. I believe that it will choose well if it embraces diversity based on openly acknowledged and publicly supported elitism. To quote from an address delivered earlier this month by Professor Donald Markwell, the present Warden of Trinity College, and an unashamed believer in excellence: ‘The alternative to accepting a diversity of institutions each playing its own particular role is..., I believe, a remorseless drive to mediocrity.’<sup>1</sup> Can we, as a nation, *afford* that dismal outcome? Do we *want* that dismal outcome? No, of course we don’t. We may not be able to go back to the halcyon days of the Menzian 1950s, or to the pre-Dawkins world. But we can, I believe, find creative ways to rescue the original University idea, and to return it to its central position in our society, albeit radically re-shaped. If we have, temporarily, lost the way, it is still not too late to find it again. And one approach to finding it again I have had the privilege to outline tonight—not an entirely novel approach (I don’t claim that), but one which deliberately builds upon ideas already current, takes them a little further, and seeks to provide them with a more explicit philosophical foundation in the age-old concept of ‘liberal education’.

I should like, by way of conclusion, to return to the life and career of the man we honour tonight, Albert Ernest Coates, and to tell you of an episode in his life which, I think, points up the moral of my address.

Albert Coates’ formal schooling—although certainly not his supervised and disciplined studies—ended at the age of 11.

From childhood, he had insisted that he would be a doctor, but it was as a ‘Postal Letter Carrier’ that he enlisted in the First AIF on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1914, less than a fortnight after the outbreak of the Great War. He still, however, nursed his early ambition, and he managed to get himself assigned to the Army Medical Corps.

Newman Rosenthal, in his partial biography of Coates, *The Albert Coates Story*<sup>2</sup>, the only biography so far to have been published, implies that Albert held firmly to this ambition, this sense of vocation, throughout the years of the War. But Rosenthal did not have access to all the private papers that are available to us now, and these private papers tell a different and sadder story.<sup>3</sup>

In March of 1916, he could still write to his parents here in Ballarat that ‘as you know I intend to commence my [medical] course as soon as I get back.’ By November of that year, he was thinking in terms of London or Edinburgh, rather than Melbourne; while in June of 1917, when he was in Paris, he even investigated the possibilities of the Faculty of Medicine at the Sorbonne! (His French by that stage, incidentally, was

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Undergraduate education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Australia at the crossroads’. Speech to the Oxford Society in Victoria, 5 September 2002, *Trinity Papers* No.20, p 17.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal and Coates, *The Albert Coates Story*, Melbourne: Hyland House, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> All the letters quoted are printed in W. and W. Gheradin (eds.) *The Volunteer*, Melbourne, 1995 (private publication).

excellent, as were several other languages).

But merely a month later, in July of 1917, he began to waver in his resolve, as he hinted in a letter to his sister Evelyn. He was more explicit in a letter to her in early November 1917:

*'I have no idea what I shall take up if I have the good fortune to return. Sometimes I think I shall continue at Medicine...[but] now, I have no fixed ambition, no decided line of action. This is a great misfortune...'*

He first expresses his doubts to his parents at the end of that month, and then writes very plainly (and painfully) to them on 21 May 1918:

*'Father was inquiring about my post war intention. As I have said many times before, I have none.'*

I pause to draw your attention to that sad, angry little sentence: 'As I have said many times before, I have none'—he had in fact said no such thing, and certainly not 'many times'. This uncharacteristically sharp response tells us much of the young man's exhaustion and war-weariness. He goes on in much the same disillusioned vein:

*'In the early days of the war my ambitions were along certain lines. After 3 and a half years of life abroad, under trying conditions, one's outlook on life cannot but have changed. At the present time I have no fixed ambition. It is useless. Experience has taught me this. You may believe me I cannot say really what I shall undertake if I survive this affair. Medicine, Chemistry, Business, Foreign Correspondent, Customs Official are all within the realms of possibility as careers of which I shall make a choice.'*

A sad letter, I'm sure you will agree. A month later, and he seems to have made up his mind. In a letter to his parents of 30 June 1918, he states definitely that 'Medicine is now out of my reach as I am too old', and he asks his father to investigate his chances of obtaining an interpreter's position in some Government department, so that he could at least build on the linguistic skills he had developed: 'I hope', he says, 'when this war ends to be the master of at least five languages. This is no mean thing'. Indeed it was not, it was 'no mean thing'; but it was not the medical

career he had so long yearned for.

All was to change when he was finally discharged and returned to Melbourne. It was then, we assume, that he discovered the degree of financial assistance and other concessions available to ex-servicemen who wished to pursue University degrees, and he learned that he could combine medical studies with part-time paid work at night (in his case, the Post Office again). Suddenly, unexpectedly, the path to medicine opened up before him once more. He told the story, laconically, but memorably, in a paper he wrote about 1974 (probably as an address):

*‘Imagine a country boy just returned from the War asking the Registrar (Mr Bainbridge) if there was a chance of entry to the Medical Course. No background of public or High School—yet good results in Public Exams of 1913. ‘Come in my boy’, he said and I’ve been in ever since.’<sup>1</sup>*

Albert Ernest Coates was back on track. In the turmoil and confusion and dangers and sheer, overwhelming fatigue of a very terrible war, he had lost the way—lost it on the field of battle itself. But he was fortunate enough to find it again when the war was over. He had met with perils along the way, as every pilgrim must, including Bunyan’s Slough of Despond, but he had overcome those perils.

And for his finding of the way again, which was to mean so much to the whole Australian community, all of us—and especially, perhaps, those of us linked to him through the nurturing influences of his family and this community of Ballarat—all of us, must be forever grateful.

*‘Hobgoblin, nor foul fiend  
Can daunt his spirit;  
He knows he at the end  
Shall life inherit.  
Then fancies fly away,  
He’ll not fear what men say,  
He’ll labour night and day  
To be a pilgrim.’*

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<sup>1</sup> MS.

### **Trinity Papers:**

This paper represents the twenty-first in a series published from time to time by Trinity College which focus upon broad issues facing the community in such areas as education, ethics, history, politics, and science.

It is the extended text of a speech given by Professor Robin Sharwood, AM at the Sir Albert Coates Oration at the University of Ballarat in Victoria on 27 September 2002.

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### **About the Author:**

Professor Robin Sharwood, a Professorial Fellow of the University of Melbourne (Faculty of Law) and Fourth Warden of Trinity College (1965-1973), knew Sir Albert intimately, being both a nephew (by marriage) and a second cousin. Like Sir Albert, he has long family connections with Ballarat.

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