

**ADDRESS BY THE HON JUSTICE RANDESON,  
CHIEF HIGH COURT JUDGE  
AT THE OPENING OF THE GREYMOUTH COURTHOUSE**

**Friday 9 February 2007**

[1] May I begin by acknowledging the representatives of the tangata whenua and thanking you for your warm welcome in this place, particularly Ben Hutana of Te Runanga o Ngati Waewae and Richard Wallace of Te Runanga o Makaawhio.

[2] The Honourable Mr Rick Barker (Minister for Courts), the Honourable Damien O'Connor (Minister of Corrections) Belinda Clark (Secretary of Justice), fellow Judges, practitioners, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

[3] It is with great pleasure that I have responded to the Secretary's invitation to speak on behalf of the High Court on the occasion of the opening of this new combined High and District Court in Greymouth. Present with me on behalf of the High Court is Justice John Hansen, the Senior Puisne Judge of the High Court and the List Judge responsible for the South Island. I convey apologies from the Chief Justice and Justice Hugh Williams who, for many years, has chaired the Courthouse Design Committee which is the committee responsible for the oversight of the design of new court buildings. They are unable to be here today but wish to be associated with this important occasion and to express their pleasure that the project has now been completed.

[4] Law and order became an issue on the West Coast in the early 1860s with the discovery of gold in the Buller and on the Coast. The sudden increase in population in Westport, Greymouth and Hokitika saw the appointment of a group of police officers and the appointment of the first resident magistrate in 1865, Mr W H Revell SM. He was reputedly a man of considerable physical stature (which was probably a distinct advantage in those frontier days). He was appointed a Judge of all Warden's Courts as well. The Warden's Courts handled all mining applications as well as the grant of timber rights.

[5] Hokitika was the first administrative centre on the Coast and the Supreme Court first sat there on 15 January 1866, Justice H B Gresson presiding. Sittings were also held

regularly in Greymouth and Westport. In those days, Justice Gresson covered the whole of the South Island and made his way to the Coast from Christchurch on horseback.

[6] Petty crime in those early days was often settled in the boxing ring and there were some novel means of resolving disputes over mining claims as well. But murder was treated more seriously with convictions resulting in the death penalty – including trials resulting from the activities of the notorious Kelly gang on the Coast.

[7] Ministers will no doubt be aware that the former Prime Minister Richard John Seddon – while born in Lancashire was a Coaster by adoption. He was a prospector, store keeper, publican and a mining advocate – a role in which he often appeared in the Warden’s Court. His son, who was himself the MP for Westland for a time, practised law in Greymouth in the 1920s.

[8] Two Supreme Court Judges (Justices Fair and Northcroft) were born on the Coast, as was Patrick Joseph O’Regan – the first member of that family to make the name well-known in the law in New Zealand. He was a Judge of the Arbitration Court and the Compensation Court in the 1940s. Justice Panckhurst (who is currently a judge sitting in the Christchurch circuit) was also born on the Coast.

[9] The court buildings have evolved over time from the original wooden courthouse established in Greymouth in the 1860s, to the building established in 1908, and now to the splendid new building to be opened today. The 1908 building was designed by the Government architect of the day, Mr John Campbell. The design was modelled, I understand, on court and municipal buildings in Cardiff, Wales. A court of similar style was also built in Masterton.

[10] The Supreme Court of earlier times is now of course the High Court. Greymouth is now the sole High Court centre on the Coast covering the area from Karamea to Haast. The High Court work is normally serviced by Judges from Christchurch including the Associate Judge (who is now able to attend by videoconference). But, the Court is used most frequently by the District Court Judges. The welcome given to visiting Judges by the Registry staff and by the profession is legendary with whitebait and blackberry pie being high on the list of culinary delights. All the Judges are most grateful for that and

for the competence and skill of the staff here under the present Registrar Mr Wayne Tibbles.

[11] The staff in Greymouth have had to be resourceful because the 1908 building was damaged in the 1969 Inangahua Earthquake and the two serious floods in May and September 1988. Those days are recalled by Mike Werner, who was the Registrar of the Greymouth Court for many years commencing at the court as a 16 year old in 1966. In those days the building was heated with coal fires and it was one of Mike's duties in the early days to make sure that the open coal fire in the Judge's chambers was in good heart when the Judge took the morning adjournment at 11.30. However, in an excess of enthusiasm on one occasion when the rather stern Justice Nigel Wilson was presiding, Mike stoked the fire to such an extent that the mantelpiece caught fire filling the Judge's chambers with smoke. Mike was called to the Judge's chambers in some trepidation. But he found a rather amused Justice Wilson and, as I understand it, the Judge and Mike became friends thereafter.

[12] Mike also recalls from the early days, the brown standard-issue government department lino on the floor (in all rooms except the Judge's chambers which were carpeted); the seven day wind-up government issue clocks; and the former registrar who, in an admirable effort to keep costs to a minimum, would not permit light bulbs in the corridors of more than 50 watts and who personally issued pencils to staff upon application. According to Mike, if your pencil reached the end of the road, the registrar at the time was only willing to issue a replacement second hand pencil, the new pencils being made available for the Judges.

[13] For some time, the existing courthouse designed by Campbell has been inadequate. The Judiciary gratefully acknowledge the efforts which have been made by you Minister, Belinda Clark, Philip Maitland (General Manager Property), Kim Williams and all the Ministry and Registry staff who have been involved in this project. I am also grateful personally to Justice Williams for his oversight of the project through the Courthouse Design Committee. All are to be congratulated for the achievement we celebrate today. We, as Judges, look forward to sitting in the new court and the continuation of the long history of the administration of justice on the Coast.