SIR CHARLES BICKERTON BLACKBURN KCMG OBE – CHANCELLOR EMERITUS, FORMER CHANCELLOR (1941–64) AND DEPUTY CHANCELLOR (1939–41)

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (MB ChM 1899, MD 1903), Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn KCMG OBE was a Fellow of Senate of the University of Sydney from 1919 to 1964. During his time on Senate, he was elected Deputy Chancellor from 1939 to 1941 and Chancellor from 1941 to 1964. On his retirement, Senate conferred on him the title Chancellor Emeritus.

PROFILE

(1874 – 1972)
KCMG OBE, BA *Adel* MD ChM HonDLitt *Sydney* HonDLitt *UNE* HonDSc *Tas, NSW & Qld* HonLLD *Melb & WAust* , FRCP FRSM FRACP HonFRCPEd
Fellow of Senate 1919 - 1964, including election by Senate as
– Deputy Chancellor 1939 - 1941
– Chancellor 1941 - 1964
– Chancellor Emeritus

His early years

Charles Bickerton Blackburn was born in Greenhithe, Kent, England and arrived in Australia in 1881 settling in Port Lincoln, South Australia with his family. He was educated at the Collegiate School of St Peter, Adelaide.

At the completion of his studies, he was awarded a scholarship and attended the University of Adelaide, attaining a Bachelor of Arts in 1893. He went on to study medicine at the University of Adelaide, but when that medical school was closed in 1896, he moved to the University of Sydney to continue his studies.

His student days at the University of Sydney

Blackburn graduated MB ChM in 1899 and MD in 1903 from the University of Sydney. He topped each year of his course and gained his doctorate for a thesis on cystic disease of the liver and kidneys.

His career

Blackburn was appointed to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 1899 as a Resident Medical Officer, and was Medical Superintendent from 1901 to 1904.

A young Charles Bickerton Blackburn (seated, centre) surrounded by nurses and staff of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, 1900-1, *photo G3_224_0883, University of Sydney Archives*.

From 1904 until 1911 he was an Honorary Assistant Physician at the hospital, and Honorary Physician from 1911 to 1934, after which he became the Honorary Consultant. He was also an Honorary Consultant to Prince Henry Hospital for almost thirty years.

From 1912 to 1934 Blackburn serves as a Lecturer in Clinical Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney, and from 1932 to 1935 was Dean of the Faculty.

Blackburn was a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Physicians and was President of that body in 1938. He was a Fellow also of the Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal Society of Medicine and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. He was elected to the Branch Council of the BMA in 1910 and was its President in the year 1920-1921. He was awarded Honorary Degrees by the Universities of New South Wales, New England, Melbourne, Tasmania, Queensland, Western Australia and Sydney.

He saw active service in the First World War as Lieutenant-Colonel in the Australian Medical Corps, was twice mentioned in despatches, and was awarded the OBE In the Second World War Sir Charles again held active rank as Lieutenant-Colonel at 113 Australian General Hospital, Concord.

He was created a Knight Bachelor in 1936 and a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1960.

He retired from practice in 1965, aged 91, and died at his home on 20 July 1972, aged 98.

From the Australian Dictionary of Biography and Senate's obituary

Charles Bickerton Blackburn, Honorary Physician, *photo from the 1924 Sydney Medical School Senior Yearbook, Faculty of Medicine Online Museum.*

Charles Bickerton Blackburn, *photo from the 1933 Sydney Medical School Yearbook.*

His membership of Senate

Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn was a Fellow of Senate of the University from 1919 to 1964, and was elected Deputy Chancellor from 1939 to 1941 and Chancellor from 1941 to 1964.

On his retirement from Senate in 1964, Senate appointed him Chancellor Emeritus.

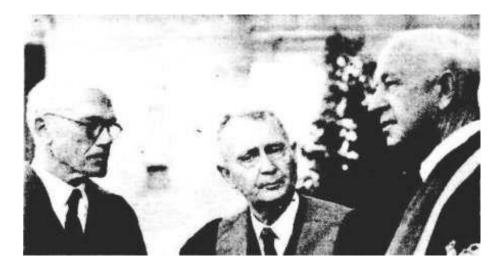Senate's obituary for Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn in 1972:

"Sir Charles was Chancellor for twenty-three years, from 1941 until 1964. He presided at his last meeting of the Senate, as Chancellor, on Monday, 2nd November, 1964. He was first elected to the Senate in 1919 and served continuously as a Fellow for the succeeding forty-five years.

As was recorded in a Senate resolution of appreciation of his services to the University at the time of his retirement, Sir Charles "guided the deliberations of this Senate with gracious dignity and wisdom, and with unobtrusive firmness; never stifling discussion nor asserting unduly his own opinion, whilst making clear, with few words, his own attitude on matters which he considered to be of moment or concerned with the welfare of the University".

In his twenty-three year term as Chancellor, Sir Charles was absent from regular meetings of the Senate on only two occasions, being in England on both of these, in one case as a representative of the University at the Tercentenary Celebrations of the Royal Society in London.

In the period from its foundation to the date of the retirement from the Chancellorship of Sir Charles, the University had awarded almost 49,000 degrees. Of these more than 31,000 were conferred by Sir Charles Blackburn.

In March, 1965, the Senate, by resolution, conferred on Sir Charles the title of Chancellor Emeritus, and in November of the same year he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) in recognition of his services to the University."

From left, Sir Trent de Crespigny, Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn and the President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (Dr S A Smith) at the conference held in Adelaide in May 1947, *photo from 'The Advertiser', 2 May 1947, NLA Newspapers*.

The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Alderman Ernest Charles O'Dea (left) and Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn (right) prior to the Commemoration Ceremony held in the Great Hall on 6 October 1950, Sydney Morning Herald photo, copies held by the University of Sydney Archives.
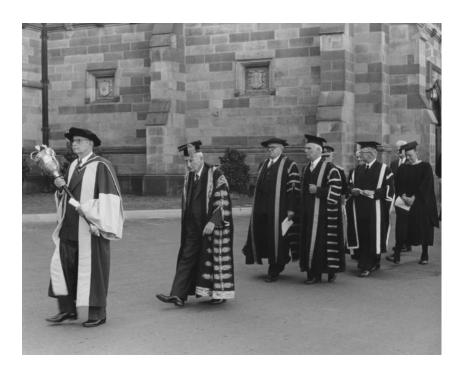

From left, Deputy Chancellor the Hon Mr Justice Roper; His Excellency the Governor of NSW, Lieutenant-General Sir John Northcott; Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn (standing); the Chief Justice of NSW, the Hon K W Street; and Emeritus Professor S H Roberts, at the Senate meeting on 5 February 1951 in celebration of the first Senate meeting on 3 February 1851, *Sydney Morning Herald photo, copies held by the University Archives.*

Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn and His Excellency the Governor-General Sir William McKell at the head of the academic procession after the Centenary Oration was delivered at 2.30pm on 28 August 1952 in the Great Hall by The Honourable K W Street, Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice of NSW, *Sydney Morning Herald photo, copies held by the University of Sydney Archives*.

Deputy Chancellor the Hon Mr Justice E D Roper (left) presenting Governor-General His Excellency The Right Honourable Sir William John McKell to the Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn for the award of an Hon LLD on 29 August 1952 as part of the University's Centenary celebrations, *Sydney Morning Herald photo, copies held by the University of Sydney Archives*.

The academic procession leaving the Great Hall: the mace-bearer leads Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn who is followed by Vice-Chancellor Sir Stephen Henry Roberts on the left and Deputy Chancellor the Hon Sir Victor Windeyer on the right, c. 1956, *photo G3_224_0877, University of Sydney Archives.*

Mrs E W Woodward (second from left) and her daughter Judith with Mrs W E Dickson and Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn, at lunch in the President's rooms after the opening of State Parliament by the Governor, Lieut.-General E W Woodward, in September 1947, *photo from 'The Australian Women's Weekly', 4 September 1957, NLA Newspapers.*

Chancellor Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn and the Queen Mother at the opening of the Queen Elizabeth II Research Institute for Mothers and Babies in 1958, *photo, courtesy University of Sydney Archives.*

Portrait of Sir Charles Bickerton Blackburn KCMG OBE by Sir William Dargie (1912-2003), 1964, oil on canvas, commissioned by the University of Sydney, University Art Collection, reproduced with the kind permission of Roger Dargie and the University of Sydney.