1. **COMPETITION OBJECT: (a)** To promote interest in, and an awareness of, Australian legal history by encouraging students to develop a facility for describing historical events and for recognising their place in broader themes; (b) To provide opportunities for Educators and Students (at several levels) to encounter Australian legal history through development of story-telling skills and exposure to broad themes, concepts underlying the general law, and particular cases of interest; and (c) To recognise excellence in the study of Australian legal history.

2. **THE TASK TO BE PERFORMED BY ESSAYISTS:** Entrants in the Competition are entitled, and required, to address any question on Australian legal history. Essays must be about “Australian legal history”. They can be (but need not be) about one of the set questions here nominated by the Society as appropriate. Any “Australian legal history” subject matter will suffice. Possibilities include Australian Constitutional history, the development of Australian law (eg, Contract, Tort, Criminal Law, Property Law, Indigenous Law), Australian legal biography and stories about Australian law and society generally (including stories about the development of parliamentary democracy in Australia, tales of Australian bushrangers and stories about Australian lawyers and their families in times of war).

3. **SET QUESTION No. 1 (Not compulsory):** The Reception of English Law in Australia: According to English common law, settled colonies (such as those in Australia were declared to be) received the laws of England as their foundation stones. The common law formula was that English laws were received so far as they were “applicable to their own situation and condition of any infant colony”. (William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 9th ed, 1783 (reprinted 1978) vol 1, pp 108-109.) In 1828,
the formula was placed into statutory words by the *Australian Courts Act* (9 Geo 4 c 83), s 24. It provided that all the laws of England shall be applied in the courts of NSW and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) "so far as the same can be applied in the said colonies".

The common law and statutory expression thus both allowed some room for variations between colonial law and the laws of England. How far could those variations go legitimately? What do the cases on this topic say about the nature of the colony compared with its country of origin?

4. **SET QUESTION NO 2** (Not compulsory): *Common Roots in British Colonial Legal History*: Is there any pattern to similarities in the legal histories of Australasia and Canada (or India)?

5. **SET QUESTION No. 3** (Not compulsory): "Mining Rights" in *Australian Legal History*: In the search for Australia's national character are there any useful parallels, or contrasts to be made, between the rights and obligations of miners associated with the Eureka Stockade Rebellion of the 1850s and debates about the rights and obligations of miners in modern Australia?

6. **SET QUESTION No. 4** (Not compulsory): *The Australian Parliament's "Marriage Power"*: Does legal history have anything to teach us about whether, on a proper construction of the *Australian Constitution*, the national Parliament's "Marriage Power" should be interpreted as including a power to enact legislation defining a marriage as including a same sex relationship?

7. **COMPETITION CATEGORIES AND PRIZES**:
   a. The Competition is open to all Students enrolled, at any time during 2012, in an Australian Secondary School or in an "undergraduate" Tertiary Course (defined as a course of study leading to the award of an undergraduate degree by an Australian University or an equivalent course, such as a Legal Practitioners Admission Board Course, approved for the purposes of the Competition by the Society), including a postgraduate practical skills course leading to admission to practice as a lawyer. For those students there are three categories of award; one for Tertiary Students, another for Senior Secondary School Students, and a third for Junior Secondary School Students.
   
   b. The Competition is not confined to students enrolled in formal study of history or law.
c. **Tertiary Student Category**

   Suggested essay length: 2000-4000 words approximately.

   Essayist’s Prize: $1,000.00 and a $1,000.00 Abbey’s Book Voucher.

d. **Senior Secondary School Category (Years 11-12 in NSW, and Interstate Equivalents).**

   Suggested essay length: 750-2000 words approximately.

   School prize (for the School of the Winning Essayist): $500.00 and a $500.00 book voucher from Abbeys Bookshop, Sydney.

   Essayist’s personal prize: $250 and a $250.00 Abbey’s book voucher.

e. **Junior Secondary Category (NSW Years 7-10 and Interstate Equivalents).**

   Suggested essay length: 500-1,000 words approximately.

   School prize (for the School of the winning Essayist): $500.00 and a $500.00 Abbey’s book voucher.

   Essayist’s personal prize: $250.00 and a $250.00 Abbey’s book voucher.

f. Each Essayist will receive a Certificate of Acknowledgement acknowledging participation in the Competition. At the discretion of the Society, Merit Certificates may be issued to selected Essayists.

8. **ESSAY SUBMISSION DEADLINE:** 5.00 pm on Monday, 10 December 2012. Essays should be submitted by email (preferably) or by post. They may be delivered by hand. Essays submitted by email should be sent to secretary@forbessociety.org.au Essays submitted by post should be addressed to The Secretary, The Francis Society for Australian Legal History, C/- NSW Bar Association, Lower Ground Floor, Selborne Chambers, 174 Phillip Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000. Essays submitted by hand should be delivered to that address.

9. **ESSAY WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT:** Australia Day (26 January) 2013. The announcement will be made on the web site of the Forbes Society (www.forbessociety.org.au)
10. **CONDITIONS OF ENTRY**

   a. The Society is the sole judge of whether an Essay satisfies the requirement that it be about “Australian legal history”.

   b. Each Essayist must certify that his or her Essay is his or her own original work.

   c. The Society reserves a right (without obligation) to accept Essays received after the Essay Submission Deadline and before the announcement of prizes.

   d. The Society reserves a right: (i) not to make any award if, in the opinion of the Council of the Society, no essay merits an award; and (ii) to award more than one prize in any Category (including prizes of lesser value for meritorious essays other than a winning essay) if the Council thinks fit.

   e. The Society reserves a right to publish, or to cause to be published as it sees fit, any Essay submitted and for that purpose to edit any Essay. [The Society anticipates that some essays will be published on its web site, and might be published or extracted in a law journal or newspaper, but does not bind itself or anybody else to publish anything].

   f. The decision of the Council of the Society is final on all questions relating to the Competition, including those relating to the conduct and outcome of the Competition; the interpretation, application, and dispensation of requirements, of these conditions; publication of Essays; and editorial work.

11. **RESEARCH HINTS: General Guidelines**

   a. There is no “word limit” as such. The “suggested Essay length” indicators for each Competition Category are for guidance only.

   b. Each Essay should include a short bibliography of the main books or other sources consulted by the Essayist in preparation of the Essay, and an acknowledgment of assistance received (eg, from teachers).

   c. So far as possible, Essayists should avoid use of quotations, particularly lengthy quotations and quotations of secondary (as distinct from primary) material.

   d. Any “Background Notes” published in these Guidelines or on the Society’s website are offered primarily as aids to potential Essayists the staff of educational institutions, and others supervising students, who may be unfamiliar with the historical or legal issues they canvass or the availability of writings with a “legal history” flavour. They are not intended to constrain any
Essayist’s approach to the Topic or any expression of opinion. They should not be read as “model essays” designed to be copied. Their object is to make available to all participants in the Competition information which might be inaccessible to some, and to serve as an encouragement to everybody to consider the desirability of consulting primary sources such as may be found in Law Reports and Hansard records of Parliamentary Debates.

c. One of the lessons to be learned from an examination of issues that arise in the context of the Essay Questions is the importance of basing any opinion upon particular facts. Judgments can vary significantly depending upon the facts identified for opinion. That is why a useful aid to clarifying thoughts is a “Chronology” which lays bare the sequence of facts thought to be relevant to any question stated for opinion.

d. To be eligible for entry into the Competition, and the award of a prize, an essay must address a question relating to Australian legal history. An essayist is free to choose any question, provided that it relates to Australian legal history.

g. Essayists are invited (but not obliged) to address one of the four set questions.

12. BACKGROUND NOTES; THE FIRST SET QUESTION: THE RECEPTION OF ENGLISH LAW IN AUSTRALIA

a. The reception of English law is of central significance to colonial law. Some judges, particularly those in the first decades of new colonies, found that try as they might, they could not impose the whole of English law on new societies. Others appeared not to try very hard.

b. Two of the most important cases were the New South Wales decisions of MacDonald v Levy (1833) 1 Legge 39; [1833] NSWSupC, and R v Maloney (1836) 1 Legge 74; [1836] NSWSupC 24. These and other relevant cases are online at [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/site/scnsw_.html](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/site/scnsw_.html). (Look at the website’s subject index under the heading Reception of English law. Both the New South Wales and Tasmanian sites have cases on this topic.)

c. A standard work on the reception of English law is BH MacPherson, The Reception of English Law Abroad (Supreme Court of Queensland Library, Brisbane, 2007).

d. Some legal historians have tended to emphasise difference rather than similarity between English and colonial law. In doing so, they have seen new (if dependent) legal cultures being developed in new lands. In
Australia, this approach was pioneered by the work of Alex Castles in his *An Australian Legal History* (Law Book Company, Sydney, 1982). His posthumously published work, *Lawless harvests or God save the judges: Van Diemen’s Land 1803-55, a legal history* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2007) was a particularly fine example of this approach. See also Bruce Kercher, *An Unruly Child: a History of Law in Australia* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995) and Bruce Kercher, *Debt, Seduction and other Disasters: the Birth of Civil Law in Convict NSW* (Federation Press, Sydney, 1996).

13. **BACKGROUND NOTES: THE SECOND SET QUESTION: COMMON ROOTS IN BRITISH COLONIAL LEGAL HISTORY**

(a) The foundations of the constitutional framework of Australia might be thought to have been laid down in the seven years between the American and French Revolutions in the 18th century.


(c) There has been a particularly close, historical connection between Australia, New Zealand and **Canada**. Lord Sydney (Tommy Townshend), the British Minister for Home Affairs after whom the Australian City of Sydney was named, was instrumental in the settlement of the boundary between the USA and Canada at the conclusion of the American War of Independence and in the establishment of the “Convict Colony” of New South Wales: Andrew Tink, *Lord Sydney: The Life and Times of Tommy Townshend* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2011). The constitutional development of Canada presaged that of Australia. Lessons learned by the British Colonial Office in Canada were applied, with less angst, in Australia: John Quick and R R Garran, *The Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth* (1901, reprinted 1976); A B Keith, *Responsible Government in the Dominions* (Oxford, 2nd ed, 1928); Paul Knaplund, *James Stephen and the British Colonial System, 1813-1847* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1953); A C V Melbourne, *Early Constitutional Development in Australia* (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1963).
Colonial judges (and administrators) of the 19th century not uncommonly served in a succession of colonies. Their experiences deepened the bonds between jurisdictions and enriched the common heritage between Australia and Canada: John McLaren, *Bewigged, Bothered and Bewildered: British Colonial Judges on Trial, 1800-1900* (Forbes/Osgoode Societies, 2011).

The practice of law throughout jurisdictions such as those in Australia and Canada – perhaps more so than the letter of the law – involved common problems to which common solutions, adapted to local circumstances, were commonly found: Peter Karsten, *Between Law and Custom: ‘High’ and ‘Low’ Legal Cultures in the Lands of the British Diaspora* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); H Foster, B L Berger and A R Buck (ed), *The Grand Experiment: Law and Legal Culture in British Settler Societies* (UBC Press, Vancouver, 2008).


Substantial academic work on the comparative legal histories of *India* and Australia remains to be done.


(j) Another small indication of the scope for exploration of historical parallels between Australia and India might be found in the fact that the Anglican Church in Australia was, in its infancy, part of the diocese of Calcutta: *Ex parte King* (1861) 2 Legge 1307 at 1325; R A Giles, *Constitutional History of the Australian Church* (London, 1929); R Border, *Church and State in Australia, 1788-1872: A Constitutional Study of the Church of England in Australia* (SPCK, London, 1962); John Davis, *Australian Anglicans and their Constitution* (Acorn Press, Canberra, 1993), p11. Given the close connection between the Church of England and many lawyers in the early colonial history of Australia, there might be scope for exploration of broader historical connections between India and Australia arising out of that connection.

14. **BACKGROUND NOTES; THE THIRD SET QUESTION: “MINING RIGHTS” IN AUSTRALIAN LEGAL HISTORY**

   a. Long before most Australians became conscious of serious debate about the importance of indigenous land rights to national identity, they learnt of land rights of a different character. The democratic, egalitarian temper of Australian society has long been associated, at least in passing, with the “Battle of Eureka Stockade” of 3 December 1854 at Ballarat on the Victorian Goldfields.

   b. Tensions between the colonial government of Victoria (acting through heavy-handed police and militia forces) and miners (many of whom had come from overseas as adventurers) culminated in talk of armed rebellion, crushed in a lightning attack by the Police, with military personnel, on a makeshift stockade manned by miners. Several police, and a greater number of the mining “diggers”, were killed.

   c. Via a Royal Commission and several criminal trials, the law was pitted against popular resistance (reflected, *inter alia*, in jury trial acquittals of miners charged with treason) in the lead up to the Imperial British Government’s grant of responsible, democratic government to Victoria.

   d. The grievances of the diggers included an objection to heavy taxation (through the cost of a Miner’s Licence, required for the lawful conduct of mining operations) and – echoing the catchcry of the American Revolution of an earlier century – an objection to “taxation without representation”.

   e. A darker side of the fledgling democratic movement was a racist, xenophobic predisposition against Chinese immigration – “cheap labour”.

   f. The Eureka Flag (a white, linear representation of the Southern Cross on a dark blue background) remains a legacy of the
Eureka Rebellion, and a symbol still much loved by many Australians.

g. The legend of Eureka found expression in the nationalistic poetry of Henry Lawson (1867-1922): in particular, *Flag of the Southern Cross* (1887); *The Fight at Eureka Stockade* (1890); and *Freedom on the Wallaby* (1891).

h. An extract from *Flag of the Southern Cross*:

Sons of Australia, be loyal and true to her –
   Fling out the flag of the Southern Cross!
Sing a loud song to be joyous and new to her –
   Fling out the flag of the Southern Cross!
Stain'd with the blood of the diggers who died by it,
   Fling out the flag to the front, and abide by it –
   Fling out the flag of the Southern Cross!

i. An extract from *The Fight at Eureka Stockade*:

“Was I at Eureka?” His figure was drawn to a youthful height,
   And a flood of proud recollections made the fire in his grey eyes bright;
With pleasure they lighted and glisten'd, tho' the digger was grizzled and old,
   And we gathered about him and listen'd while the tale of Eureka he told.

“Ah, those were the days,” said the digger, “‘twas a glorious life that we led,
   When fortunes were dug up and lost in a day in the whirl of the years that are dead.
But there's many a veteran now in the land – old knights of the pick and the spade,
   Who could tell you in language far stronger than mine ‘bout the fight at Eureka Stockade.

“We were all of us young on the diggings in days when the nation had birth –
   Light-hearted, and careless, and happy, and the flower of all nations on earth;
But we would have been peaceful an’ quiet if the law had but let us alone;
   And the fight – let them call it a riot – was due to no fault of our own.

“The creed of our rulers was narrow – they ruled with a merciless hand,
   For the mark of the cursed broad arrow was deep in the heart of the land.
They treated us worse than the negroes were treated in slavery’s day –
And justice was not for the diggers, as shown by the Bently affray.

“P’r’aps Bently was wrong. If he wasn’t the bloodthirsty villain they said,
He was one of the jackals that gather where the carcass of labour is laid.
’Twas b’lieved that he murdered a digger, and they let him off scot-free as well,
And the beacon o’ battle was lighted on the night that we burnt his hotel.

“You may talk as you like, but the facts are the same (as you’ve often been told),
And how could we pay when the license cost more than the worth of the gold?
We heard in the sunlight the clanking o’ chains in the hillocks of clay,
And our mates, they were rounded like cattle an’ handcuffed an’ driven away.

“The troopers were most of them new-chums, with many a gentleman’s son;
And ridin’ on horseback was easy, and hunting the diggers was fun.
Why, many poor devils who came from the vessel in rags and down-healed,
Were copped, if they hadn’t their license, before they set foot on the field.”

An extract from Freedom on the Wallaby:

So we must fly a rebel flag,
As others did before us,
And we must sing a rebel song
And join in rebel chorus.
We'll make the tyrants feel the sting
O’ those that they would throttle;
They needn’t say the fault is ours
If blood should stain the wattle!

15. BACKGROUND NOTES: THE FOURTH SET QUESTION: THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT’S “MARRIAGE POWER”

(a) Although there may be no discernable, direct or indirect relationship between law and morality, large questions about what it is to live in society might have both a legal and a moral dimension, neither of which can be avoided by any person contemplating an answer.
(b) Section 51(xxi) of the Australian Constitution confers on the national Parliament power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the nation with respect to “Marriage”. The Constitution contains no definition of “Marriage”. Questions about whether the Parliament can, and / or should, enact a law defining “Marriage” as including same sex relationships are currently the subject of widespread public debate. Any answer to those questions is likely to have both a legal and a moral dimension, each of which may invite consideration of what it means to live in society and what are the proper functions and limits of law in society.

(c) The key to research might be to recognize that one of the questions debated by Constitutional lawyers is whether the meaning of words in a Constitution is governed by their meaning at the time the Constitution first acquired the force of law or whether their meaning can, should or must change with changes of meaning in society at large. However such questions might be answered, historical inquiry might be called in aid.

(d) The existence of that debate might be thought to be determinative of everything, or of nothing at all, depending on whether or not it is accepted that there has been a change in the meaning of the concept of “Marriage” in the general community.

(e) Minds might also differ about whether the concept of “Marriage” is essentially a moral one, in which the formalities of the law are of secondary significance, and about whether its moral dimension is governed by values that are absolute or relative to time and place.

(f) Debate might also focus on whether the essence of “marriage” is an agreement between individuals operating independently of any law or a legal construct (such as an agreement enforceable as a contract or a transaction required to be recorded in a public register because it may affect rights of other parties or property rights) operating independently of any higher concerns of conscience or morality.

(g) A conventional starting point for debate about the nature and scope of the Australian Parliament’s “Marriage Power” might be the commentary on section 51(xxi) of the Constitution in the classic legal text of Quick and Garran, The Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth (1901; reprinted, 1976) at pages 608-609.
That commentary commences with the following paragraphs:

“Marriage is a relationship originating in contract, but it is something more than a contract. It is what is technically called a status, involving a complex bundle of rights, privileges, obligations, and responsibilities which are determined and annexed to it by law independent of contract. According to the law of England a marriage is a union between a man and a woman on the same basis as that on which the institution is recognised throughout Christendom, and its essence is that it is (1) a voluntary union, (2) for life, (3) of one man and one woman, (4) to the exclusion of all others. (Bethell v. Hildyard, 38 Ch. D. 220).

Laws relating to this subject will therefore embrace (1) the establishment of the relation, including preliminary conditions, contractual capacity, banns, license, consent of parents or guardians, solemnization, evidence, and rules in restraint, (2) the consequences of the relation, including the status of the married parties, their mutual rights and obligations, the legitimacy of children and their civil rights. Quaere whether this power will enable the Parliament to legislate with respect to breach of promise of marriage; immoral agreements concerning marriage; and the separate property of married women. It could be argued that the first two matters belong to the general law of contracts, and the last one to the general law relating to civil rights; both of which classes of laws are reserved to the States. It might be said, however, that they impinge on the principal grant of power, ‘marriage,’ and are conveyed by it”.

The history of social attitudes to law is full of ironies, two of which may be noticed in the context of Australian attitudes to marriage. The first relates to the futility of attempts to live outside laws relating to marriage. The second to the desire of a class of people who once lived in fear of criminal prosecution now campaigning, under the banner of civil liberties, to have their names included on a public register controlled by government.

The first example: The generation of Australians who voted for the nation’s Constitution may have imagined that the only way for a couple to “marry” was in a church, in a ceremony conducted by a clergyman, culminating in an announcement having legal consequences: a
pronouncement of the happy couple as “man and wife”. Subsequent generations who sought to escape religious ceremonies could engage the law through a secular ceremony conducted by a civil celebrant having the same legal consequences as a church wedding. However, those who sought to escape the strictures of the law by living in a “common law marriage” or (as it became known) a “de facto relationship” found that, courtesy of legislation enacted in all Australian States, substantially the same legal consequences attaching to a marriage attach to a “de facto relationship” productive of children or enduring for more than a defined period. The social imperatives of a legal system may compel it to extend its reach even to those who live within a society but seek to live outside legal convention. There are now no less than four ways for a couple to “marry”: in a church; in a civil ceremony; by living together for a defined period; or by living together and having a child.

(k) The second example: Civil libertarians periodically, and justifiably, warn Australians of the risks of a “big brother” form of government in which personal details are placed on record. In an era in which homosexual acts were at risk of criminal prosecution by the State, homosexual couples might have lived in fear of any proposal for public registration of their relationships. In more recent times, although still fearful of what they perceive to be unfair discrimination, homosexual couples campaigning for what they claim to be “equal rights” to marriage are, implicitly, agitating to have their names and relationships recorded in a public register controlled by the State. In these shifting sands the concept of “civil liberties” appears to be a function of changing social conditions.

(l) Whatever meaning is attributed to the word “Marriage” in section 51, some insights into its meaning might be derived from a consideration of section 51(xxii) of the Constitution. It confers on the Australian Parliament power to make laws with respect to “Divorce and matrimonial causes” and, in relation thereto, “parental rights, and the custody and guardianship of infants”.

(m) Reference might also be made to Henry Finlay, To Have But Not To Hold: A History of Attitudes to Marriage and Divorce in Australia, 1858-1975 (Federation Press, Sydney, 2005); Rebecca Probert, Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment (Cambridge University Press, 2009); J A Nichols (ed), Marriage and Divorce in a Multicultural Contest: Multi-Tiered Marriage and the Boundaries of Civil Law and Religion (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
16. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SUPPORT:** The Francis Forbes Society for Australian Legal History acknowledges the support for this Essay Competition it has received from the following institutions:

**The New South Wales Bar Association,**
ABN 18 526 414 014,
Basement, Selborne Chambers,
174 Phillip Street,
www.nswbar.asn.au
Tel: (02) 9232 4055
Contact: Chris Winslow, Publications Manager.

**Macquarie Law School,**
**Macquarie University,**
ABN 90 952 801 237,
Epping Road,
NORTH RYDE, NSW, 2109.
www.law.mq.edu.au

**The Law Society of New South Wales,**
ACN 000 000 699,
170 Phillip Street,
www.lawsociety.com.au
Tel: (02) 9992 6033
Contact: Michael Tidball.

**The Federation Press,**
ABN 67 003 409 318,
PO Box 45,
ANNANDALE, NSW, 2038.
www.federationpress.com.au
Contact: Diane Young, Director.
Tel: (02) 9552 2200.

**Abbey’s Bookshop,**
ABN 86 000 650 975,
131 York Street,
www.abbeys.com.au
Tel: (02) 9264 3111
Contact: Dave Hall, Manager.

**State Records NSW,**
ABN 96 588 554 718,
NSW Department of Commerce.
Western Sydney Records Centre:
143 O’Connell Street,
KINGSWOOD, NSW, 2747.
Sydney Records Centre:
2 Globe Street,
The Rocks,
www.records.nsw.gov.au
Contact: Christine Yeats, Manager, Public Access.
Tel: (02) 8247 8617.

**The State Library of New South Wales,**
Macquarie Street,
www.sl.nsw.gov.au
Contact: Kay Payne, State Library Foundation.
Tel: (02) 9273 1593.

**The Legal Affairs Section,**
**The Australian Newspaper**

**The Dictionary of Sydney**
GPO Box 1591
Sydney, NSW, 2001
www.dictionaryofsydney.org
Contact: Emma Grahame, Editorial Coordinator,
Email: emma.grahame@dictionaryofsydney.com.
Tel: (02) 9265 9906

Date: 25 January 2012