

2. Building

'The world is old, and we are new.'

L. F. Giblin

In the years between 1919 and 1924, four men – Giblin, Copland, Brigden and Wilson – formed a bond at the University of Tasmania that was to endure until death. Together, in that short span, they made Tasmania one of the more interesting centres of economic inquiry anywhere in the world. The theory of the Multiplier received its earliest discussion there. The modern theory of the impact of protection on real wages was distinctly anticipated. One of the first investigations of the Quantity Theory to go beyond enumerating price levels and money supplies was also undertaken there. This seeming Ultima Thule of economic thought became, for a while, an Edinburgh of the South.

And the four gave Tasmania more than a simply vigorous seat of economics. Contemporary observers recorded the exhilarating stimulus these four men provided a then depressed, defensive and introverted society. And, yet, Tasmania also gave to them. Tasmania – it may be said – gave them her problems. In the 1920s Tasmania the issue of growth and decline was blatant. In the first third of the twentieth century, her population grew by only 0.7 per cent per annum compared with 1.6 per cent per annum of Australia as a whole. Tasmania also gave them her isolation. In 1920s there was no telephone link to mainland Australia,¹ no airlink to the mainland, and no sea link from the state's capital to the mainland. A journey to Melbourne from Hobart required a rail journey of almost six hours to Launceston, followed by a passage across the uncalm seas of a strait sevenfold as broad as the English Channel.² It is worth pondering the intellectual energy created by 'stranding' a small group of congenial and inquiring persons. Giblin, Copland and Brigden were thrown on their own, fairly considerable, resources.

Finally, Tasmania gave them the fruits of the struggle of a colonial meritocracy to reform, advance, and enlighten their community; a full endowment of institutions to air and analyse its problems. With a population of 200 000 people Tasmania could claim two houses of parliament, the longest experience of 'responsible government' of any Australian state,³ a governor, an 'ambassador'

¹ There was to be no telephone connection until 1936, when the (then) largest coaxial telephone cable in the world was laid across Bass Strait.

² An illustration of the impediments of moving to and from Tasmania is that in 1919 Copland was absent from the University on account of the difficulties experienced 'in securing a passage to Tasmania' (Dunn and Pratt 1990, p17).

³ Formally since 1854: one year longer than New South Wales.

to England in the form of a High Commissioner, a Statistician, a Royal Society, and Rhodes Scholarships. And it had a university.

Ideas of a university

Copland arrived in Tasmania to find a university existing in painful miniature. The University of Tasmania had been born of a conflict between the visionary aspirations of Tasmania's cultural elite and the colony's slender material resources. A youthful Giblin had once witnessed his father's friend Inglis Clarke holding forth John Henry Newman's *Idea of university* as the appropriate model for the island university. The *Idea of the university*, Tasmania's institution could not be. Nevertheless, in the face of significant opposition, the friends of higher learning successfully founded the University of Tasmania in 1890.⁴

In keeping with the straitened economic circumstances of the times, the University's entire academic staff initially consisted of three people. And to pursue the economy further, all three were appointed at the lecturer level: this was a university without professors. And the three were not 'fellows'; the University deemed them to be 'servants' in status, and the University chose to use that language to describe its scholars for the next 30 years. There was some growth over that period, but when Copland arrived it could still be described as minuscule. In 1918 the total number of students in the university was 85. The total teaching staff in 1925 was 19.

Economics had been examined since 1893. The very first reading list for 'political economy' was solid and modern: Mill, Jevons, and Marshall's utterly up-to-the-minute text, the *Principles of economics*. But this vigorous start was followed by 25 years of drift until the arrival of Copland in 1917. The newly appointed Lecturer in History and Economics was disappointed to find '... an extensive course in history but in economics there was only ... one subject, political economy as it was called' (Copland 1968, p. 7). Copland decided that this situation could not be tolerated, and he set about changing it with the enormous drive that was to characterise his subsequent professional career.

Within months of his arrival in Tasmania in 1917 Copland had arranged a conference between the University's Extension Board, professional accounting bodies and the Registrar of the University, and in August 1917, Copland proposed the establishment of a four-year Bachelor of Commerce degree. The parliament promised £500; the Hobart Chamber of Commerce promised another £500. After more than a year's delay the University Council finally agreed in December 1918 to establish Copland's commerce degree. The fee for the new degree was to be about £25 and 4s – about four months of average earnings, and inexpensive in

⁴ Queensland, with more than twice the population of Tasmania in 1890, was not to establish her university for another 20 years.

the values of the day.⁵ The subjects were to include: Economic Geography; Economics I and II; Currency and Banking; and Statistical Method. Graduates duly followed, with Myrtle Reid-McIlvrey admitted to the BCom in 1924.

Copland's attention then turned to the establishment of a new faculty – the Faculty of Commerce – to administer the new qualification. This took very little time: the Faculty became a legal entity in April 1919 with Copland as its first Dean.

In creating a degree with no almost staff, Copland assumed an enormous load. It appears that he was, incredibly, responsible for 20 courses over a single year. This was incredible, and slightly crazy. Something had been set incorrectly in Copland's mental mechanism. He was a cauldron in which fires burnt too fiercely. This uncontrolled furnace eventually produced calamity. He collapsed in Melbourne during an academic visit.⁶ He spent three months recuperating. There were to be more collapses.

But it was this same heat that shattered walls, and forced a path for him through almost all obstacles. He was propelled; he would never rest and never be entirely content. In 1920 the Council offered to pay him £500 per annum at a time when lecturers were sometimes rewarded with £200 per annum. But this flattering offer did not bring any self-satisfaction. 'I am prepared to accept the proposal of the Council', he coolly replied.⁷ He was painfully jealous of any preferment his colleagues might enjoy;⁸ and was spurred by a well-developed sense of his own worth. All four university colleges in New Zealand had professors of economics. Why should he not be a professor of economics? The day after his 26th birthday he wrote to Council proposing that a Chair in Economics be created.

It is at this point Copland's career intersects with Giblin's.

In December 1919 Giblin had been appointed to the post of Statistician to the Government of Tasmania. This appointment was more than it seemed. It carried the duty of advising the Tasmanian Government on financial and economic

⁵ The fee of the new commerce degree compares favourably to the £40 (per annum) that Robert Wilkins Giblin charged almost a century before for enrolment in the New Town Academy.

⁶ This collapse appears to have taken place in June 1921. In August he was still on sick leave (Dunn and Pratt 1990, p. 27). The *Westralian Worker* also reported a 'nervous break down' in Perth in November 1921.

⁷ Copland was 'a difficult man to work with' (Hyttén 1971). Another colleague judged: 'He liked being the boss' (Reddaway quoted in Millmow 2003).

⁸ See, for example, Copland's evident anguish at a member of his department receiving an appointment to inquire into state high schools (Dunn and Pratt 1990, p. 31).

matters – perhaps the first such position in Australia.⁹ Giblin was also taking the place of an eminent preceding occupant: R. M. Johnston (1844-1918) who, as Statistician between 1882 and 1918, had made a significant contribution to the techniques for national income accounting, and had pioneered the argument that Tasmania suffered from ‘disabilities’ imposed by Federation. Johnston had also been a political economist: mathematical in his method, and conservative in his conclusions. Thus with this appointment Giblin was well positioned to speak with some weight of the worthiness of Copland’s proposal for the Chair of Economics.

At about the same time Giblin was elected to the University Council and soon became a member of the faction that wielded power in the University – ‘The Block’. Giblin was the person to have on side for any decision, especially of a financial nature. Giblin quickly decided that Copland’s case for his appointment was worthy.

Thus an alliance between Copland and Giblin formed that was to stay fast until death. It was not, however, a symmetrical, or equal, alliance. Copland was twenty-six years old; Giblin was forty-seven. Copland’s relationship with Giblin has been described by Tom Fitzgerald as ‘ungrudgingly, filial’.¹⁰ Copland said as much himself. ‘Perhaps I know better than any of the economists of that day what it meant to come under his parental care’ (Copland 1960, p. 4).

Copland revered Giblin. But Giblin did not revere Copland. Copland recorded, accurately, that he was ‘young and inexperienced in academic affairs’ when he first met Giblin, and that the older man was ‘never failing to deliver a reproof’ to the younger one ‘where he thought it was needed’ (Copland 1960, p. 4). There was also a wider, more psychological gulf. Copland was restless, Giblin calm. Copland was obvious; Giblin was, in his own description, ‘reticent’. Giblin had a sense of life’s ironies that the literal Copland never possessed.¹¹ Copland was in the words of one warm admirer, ‘a simple man’ (Downing 1971). Giblin was mysterious.

Yet Giblin was ‘a man of great sympathy and understanding’. And Giblin was quick to recognise an ample talent and keen to ‘kick it along’ (Wilson 1984). Giblin piloted the fragile raft of Copland’s reform through the extensive reefs of the University. It was Giblin who, within a few weeks of the proposal,

⁹ In 1924 the Tasmanian Statistical Office was merged with the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, and Giblin transferred to the Commonwealth service as Deputy Commonwealth Statistician for Tasmania, while retaining his function of advisor to the Tasmanian Government on economic matters.

¹⁰ JCPML 0653/068/20/6/6.

¹¹ Giblin once admitted that he could not resist ‘baiting’ Copland. Montague Norman was another whom Giblin confessed he could not resist ‘baiting’.

submitted to the University Council on March 1920 a memorandum supporting Copland's case. It was Giblin who successfully moved at Council that a Chair (combined with the Workers' Education Association [WEA] position of Director of Tutorial Classes) should be established. It was, undoubtedly, Giblin who, as a member of the Standing Committee considering applications, persuaded the Committee to recommend Copland to Council. The Council offered him the appointment on 21 December 1920, and Copland became the first Professor of Economics in the University of Tasmania, still not yet twenty-seven years old.¹²

The alliance between Giblin and Copland continued during their dealings with the WEA responsibilities associated with the new Chair. Copland was firmly committed to the Association. The WEA expressed the predominant spirit of early post-war years. As he later recalled, his fellow movement members 'were greatly influenced by the rising school of progressive thought on social problems ... we read *The New Statesman*, *The New Age* and the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* rather more than the *Economist*' (Copland 1952, p. 31). And by allying itself with 'progressive thought' the Association promised to capture for economics rising members of the labour movement 'who might, and often did, become ministers in State cabinets'.

Under Copland's stewardship the WEA in Tasmania had grown from two branches in 1917 to nine branches in 1920. Staffing this expansion was a challenge, and there existed a vacancy in the West Coast branch. At the Council meeting of March 1921 Giblin reported that the British WEA had recommended one of their staff, J. B. Brigden, for the appointment.

The Peaks of Lyell

By July 1921 Brigden had arrived in Tasmania to take up duty in what was surely the hardest of hardship posts in academia: an evening class teacher in Queenstown, a lonely mining settlement 260 kilometres west of Hobart, nestled in a mountainous wilderness rising to 4000 feet.

Queenstown was not then 30 years old. It was spawned at the time Giblin was in the Klondike, when a 'Copper Rush' in western Tasmania sent thousands to Mount Lyell, and the Hobart stock exchange remained opened throughout the night to cope with the excitement.

In its subsequent history, 1.3 million tons of copper ore was torn from the 'peaks of Lyell', and crushed and incinerated in the smelters at its foot. In the valley below grew Queenstown 'hewn out of dark-swamp forest' (Blainey 1954, p. 92).

¹² Copland has not been the youngest person to claim a professorial appointment in Australia. Enoch Powell was 25 when appointed Professor of Greek at Sydney University.

The town stood in the path of the Roaring 40s. It was visited by tornadoes, and it rained 300 days a year.

The natural climate was further despoiled by man. The extraction of the copper required sulphur; the 'brimstone' of the Bible.

Sulphur was the curse of Mt Lyell. When the big company smelted its pyrite in ten or eleven furnaces Queenstown found its climate changing. In still weather sulphurs from the smelters thickened into pea soupers, choked Queenstown, and blanketed the valley. For days on end men working in the flux quarries on the hills above the town basked in winter sun, and looked down on the creamy waste of cotton wool in the valley. Men who set out with hurricane lamps for the smelters in the morning were sometimes found miles away in the evening. Sulphur was in every breath of air; even tobacco lost its taste. (Blainey 1954, p. 99).

Sulphur deadened the sense of smell, and thereby dulled the sense of taste. It corroded buildings and power lines. It washed into the Queen River, and reportedly left it the most polluted waterway in the Southern Hemisphere. It acidified the vapour borne by the clouds, and the poisoned rain burnt away the vegetation in torrential downpours.

Whatever wood was left was felled to feed the furnaces. Perhaps three million tons of wood were cut between 1896 and 1926. At its peak, 20 acres of forest per week were consumed to stoke the fires. By 1900 Mt Owen – once carpeted in forest – had been stripped totally bare of leaf, blade and stem. It was now a looming presence of red and black rock, variously compared with a cemetery, a desert, a battlefield, hell with the fires gone out.

And for such an existence, there were only meagre material compensations. The end of the First World War spelt a slide in the price of copper. By 1921 it stood at only \$US279 per ton compared with \$US644 at the 1917 peak. The company proposed a 20 per cent cut in pay. Half the workforce were dismissed. Closure loomed. So did an all-out strike.

Into this environment Brigden arrived, resolved to spread the sweetness and light of economic reason. One result was *The economics of Lyell*, published in May 1922 under Copland's patronage, and intended to provide his West Coast WEA students with a 'textbook'. The issue that this publication grapples with was the creation of wealth and its distribution – both acute matters in Queenstown. In order to engage with the issue of distribution Brigden produced, in appendices, an estimate of Australia's national income, the first since those of Timothy Coghlan of 1886. Brigden's method was simple if not crude: he extrapolated across the entire workforce the *per capita* value added through industry that had been recorded by a 1915 census. He thereby obtained a figure £377m for Australia's total income in 1915, an estimate that compares decently

with the later 'authoritative' estimate of £377m (Butlin 1962). Brigden then sought to break this total down into profit and wage shares. He made a rough estimate of the annual rate of return which the owners of this wealth might have achieved, then applied his rate-of-return estimate to a figure for the stock of wealth produced by the Census of Wealth carried out for 1915. In this way he arrived at a figure of £130m for aggregate income from ownership of property in 1915, and so (residually) £247m for income from work (the second component).

'This was no great beginning after Coghlan's achievements': so writes the historian of Australian national income accounting of Brigden's effort (Butlin 1962, p. 38). Perhaps beginnings are frequently 'not great'. Brigden's simple exercise is nevertheless important because it represents the first attempt to educate the public in the concept of national income, and the relative size of the wage and profit shares into which it is divided.¹³ This was an educational exercise that Brigden, Copland and Giblin were to deploy repeatedly, especially during the Great Depression.

The appointment at Queenstown, therefore, brought Brigden his first publication in economics. But would Dorothy Brigden have been adequately consoled? The contrast with Ide Hill would have been fierce. Possibilities of escape must have been steadily pondered. They may have seemed frighteningly narrow.

But in 1922 there arrived an opportune death. William Pitt Cobbett was the eminent and irascible foundation Professor of Law at the University of Sydney and renowned scholar of international law. On his retirement he moved to Hobart, where he died in 1919. In his will he directed that a trust fund of £5000 be established to advance economic inquiry. How came this strange gratuity to economic research? It appears that William Pitt Cobbett was a kinsman to another, much better-known Cobbett: William Cobbett (1763–1835) journalist, stirrer, reactionary, radical and hammer of political economy. It is tempting to ask if William Pitt Cobbett's difficult brilliance may have owed something – by either inheritance or example – to William Cobbett. These are speculations. What is fact is that, in 1883, William Pitt Cobbett's father published a new edition of William Cobbett's enduring piece of reportage, *Rural rides during the years 1821–1832: with economical and political observations*, spiced with rants against Ricardo and 'Scotch feelosofers'.

¹³ Brigden's foray into national income accounting was soon to be eclipsed by J.A. Sutcliffe's *The national dividend of 1926*. 'This is an amazing book' wrote Giblin. 'Never, I should think has such a feast of the most difficult economic and statistical conclusions been packed into a modest 70 pages. We have the national income, not for one poor year, but for every year from 1911 right down to 1924–25, computed in two ways, giving remarkably harmonious results' (Giblin 1927b).

It is through Pitt Cobbett's esteem for the economist-hating William Cobbett that Brigden managed to join the University proper, and transfer to Hobart as the new Pitt Cobbett Lecturer in Economics.

A 'man's man' of broad and true scholarship

Copland was organising his final recruit to Giblin's Platoon. As the student who had come second in the state in the matriculation examination, and as winner of the William Robert Giblin Scholarship, Roland Wilson had come to Copland's attention. Copland came up to Ulverstone to seek an interview with Roland's father, a builder. University was not what the father, or son, had envisaged.

I didn't even know what a university was in those days, and I'm not too sure whether many other people did either. (Wilson 1984).

Wilson was coaxed into completing a single year of the new Bachelor of Commerce degree in the University of Tasmania.

It was 'all a bit strange', Wilson recalled 60 years later. The majority of lectures took place between 5 pm and 9 pm. He was the sole full-time student. And the interest of almost all other students was strictly vocational, save for his classmate, Keith Isles, with whom he later did battle in the *Economic Record*.¹⁴ But there were compensations. Copland was an 'exceptionally good teacher' (Hytten 1971). Copland brought his own strong sense of aspiration into the classroom. He would scatter Latin tags, in the face of the mute incomprehension of students. A favourite that he would leave his students was: *Cras ingens, interabimus aequor* – 'Tomorrow, again the unknown seas'. As one former student recalls:

Physically, Douglas Copland was not easily overlooked. His frame was tall and broad-shouldered, his figure lean and athletic until middle age, thick and bulky thereafter. His face was somewhat heavy, given mobility by a curious and attractive lightness in the eyes and genial expression of bonhomie ... He had an ebullient personality and an unusual booming rasping voice (probably the product of asthma and elocution lessons) ... These were assets for a public speaker. Audiences were seldom indifferent. (Harper 1984).

Wilson was also not indifferent to Brigden, who taught Wilson Economics II in 1923, and whose lectures Wilson assiduously typed out. Between the dry, laconic, sometimes 'acid tongued' Wilson, and the poetic, discursive, ever-courteous Brigden, there grew a rapport that might not have been anticipated. Brigden seemed to pluck in Wilson a string that gave a deeper, fuller tone than his commonly sharp, astringent notes.

¹⁴ Keith Isles (1902–77), economist, and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania during the latter part of the Orr affair.

The year before meeting Brigden, Wilson first encountered Giblin, in a different and more unexpected way. Wilson recalled the occasion in his 1976 Giblin Memorial Lecture:

While I was a student at this University my second-year essay on inheritance laws and taxation led him to seek personal acquaintance with the obscure author. A hand-written note invited me to lunch – which turned out to be poached eggs in a Murray Street café. It was followed by the suggestion that I should draft a bill on the subject of my essay for submission to the Tasmanian Parliament – a proposal which left me completely flabbergasted – and then by a visit to the Royal Tennis Court where I was introduced to the mysteries of one of the games at which he so excelled. (Wilson 1976, p. 308).¹⁵

Giblin persuaded Wilson to do another year's study: 'He began actively to encourage my studies'. In a later year of his degree, Giblin appointed him Secretary of the State Disabilities Committee, 'So I had six months of very good apprenticeship with him looking over my shoulder'. Giblin later explained to Keynes, 'We talk one another's language more than most, and I am greatly attached to him' (KCLA LFG 15 May 1943). A 'warm friendship' that would last 30 years had begun.

Giblin's patronage of Wilson was to occasion a pivotal incident of Giblin's difficult relationship with Tasmanian society at large in the 1920s. John Reynolds (1901–85),¹⁶ a youthful contemporary in the 1920s, has provided the background in a memoir entitled, 'L. F. Giblin: A plea for an adequate biography and Tasmanian incidents' (Reynolds c. 1951).

The post-war generation in Hobart was as mentally adrift and unadjusted as elsewhere throughout the world. The high hopes of brighter new worlds as preached by the starry-eyed patriots, which had taken fathers and elder brothers to Gallipoli and Flanders, did not eventuate. Old pre-war Hobart, and Tasmania for that matter, seemed by 1921 to be slipping back into the outlook of the depression years of the eighteen nineties. The old exclusive social sets ... still set the fashion in thinking; deference was paid to them by the University, and religious and other bodies.

¹⁵ 'I dared not tell him at that time that I had been compelled to take his invitation down to his office to have his crabbed script decyphered by one of his clerks. Years later in Canberra, I idly asked one day about the circumstances in which he was shot through the hand, this being the commonly accepted explanation for his peculiar hand-writing. His somewhat icy reply was that he had never been shot through the hand, and why did I ask? I did not pursue the subject' (Wilson 1976, p. 308).

¹⁶ The father of Henry Reynolds.

It was into this gloomy atmosphere that Giblin appeared like a brilliant meteor.
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For those with eyes, he gave new horizons, quite literally. He encouraged travel abroad, when a presumption reigned that this pleasure was reserved for the rich. He encouraged Tasmanians to discover their own state. He never ceased to talk about the attractions of the Tasmanian mountains and the unique character of the island's geology, flora, and fauna. To demonstrate his beliefs, he led many expeditions into the then 'unknown' country west of Mt Wellington ...

In 1926 Giblin became probably the first man, and almost certainly the first white man, to defy the 'absolutely foul weather conditions and intense exposure' and successfully scale Mt Anne (1425 metres).¹⁸ 'His simple talks to plain folk about these feats had a great deal to do with the formation of the now flourishing walking, mountaineering and skiing clubs' (Reynolds c. 1951).

It only further tickled Giblin's admirers, and grated his adversaries, that Giblin deported himself 'eccentrically'. Five years before Bunny Austin, the Davis Cup champion, had refused the traditional tennis attire of cricket flannels, and had asked his tailor to create some shorts, Giblin had already adopted shorts for the summer of 1928. When the Governor required all attendees of Royal Society of Tasmania meetings to wear dinner jackets, Giblin arrived late, in a battered slouch hat and haversack, 'went right up the front, sat down just opposite the Governor and cocked one hobnailed boot almost in his face' (Hyttén 1971, p. 53).

Giblin's capacity to shock also took more serious forms. In 1925 at the formal dinner to commemorate the centenary of the separation of Van Dieman's Land from New South Wales, he expressed a preference for a Soviet form of government for the island.

Giblin, in other words, was a 'progressive'. 'It is impossible within the limits of this article' wrote Reynolds 'to recall all his battles with prejudice and stupidity'.

One battle involved his youngest protégé, Roland Wilson. As Wilson later recalled, Giblin had 'eventually persuaded a very reluctant young man to seek an opportunity for overseas study'. But where lay that opportunity? The Tasmanian Scholarship that had borne Giblin to Cambridge had been abolished.

¹⁷ 'It was in Tasmania during his middle age (1919–29) that Giblin exercised a wide influence upon his generation, and this phase will provide a biographer with deeply interesting, if illusive, material'.

¹⁸ Giblin did not succeed on the first attempt. In 1920, 1921 and 1922 Giblin and his brother Allen led three expeditions of exploration in the Weld River Valley in south-western Tasmania. Their 1921 attempt to reach Mt Anne was forced back 'having taken three and a half days to penetrate 18 miles through horizontal scrub' (Wilson 2001).

The one path to overseas study was the Rhodes Scholarship. But here stood an obstacle. 'Since the inception of the scheme of the Rhodes Scholarships candidates had come exclusively from private secondary schools which enjoyed the doubtful patronage of the "Right People"' (Reynolds c. 1951). Wilson came from a State school, and Giblin was very much not of the 'Right' people.

But Giblin ran the Scholarship selection committee, and with Copland and Brigden called into battle, the committee chose Wilson.¹⁹ His success was vehemently resented: it was 'unthinkable' that a Rhodes Scholar could come from a state high school, and have studied economics but not Latin. A display of indignation was organised. A 'Member of the University Senate' complained anonymously in the *Hobart Mercury*:

The local selection committee made the choice of the wrong type of man to be our Rhodes Scholar for 1925 ... The Rhodes Trust discourages the candidature of students specializing merely in a science or a commerce course, but requires a 'man's man' of broad and true scholarship.

The *Hobart Mercury* itself pronounced in its editorial of 19 March 1925:

Rhodes 'knew that the business mind which is only a business mind, or the scientific mind which is only the scientific mind, is not the highest type of mind or the type necessary for a true statesman or leader of men ... Philosophy, literature, history, science, economics – that is the order by rank.

The controversy discouraged Wilson. He was tempted to relinquish the award, and accept in its stead a position as factotum to the directors of the local Cadbury concern. The urgings of Copland and Giblin braced him to ignore the contempt of the *Mercury*. As a result Giblin became a 'target of abuse'.²⁰

The *contretemps* over the 1925 Tasmanian Rhodes Scholarship underlines Giblin's struggle against an introverted and excluding Tasmanian elite. But it may also be one symbol of the arrival of the economist in Australian public life. An economist had won the Rhodes Scholarship.

¹⁹ Copland wrote to the Committee of Rhodes Scholars: 'Mr Brigden supports me in this high appreciation of Wilson's work. We are both of the opinion that Mr Wilson has exceptional qualifications ... We do not expect to find such a talent among our students for some time' (UMA DBC 2 December 1924).

²⁰ 'Major Giblin, like his hero Shaw, thrives on criticism and publicity. Indeed, those who do not like him – and they are not a few – say that he deliberately courts it' (*Weekly Courier*, 29 February 2004). Giblin was never a member of the Tasmania Club. He probably would never have been admitted, and would never have wanted to be.

Wilson was soon to be a student at Oriel, Brigden's old college. But before he had even left, he had been introduced to Oxford. A debating team from the University of Oxford was touring Australia, and the University of Tasmania's team had accepted their challenge. Brigden – the witness, presumably, of many debates in the trades hall and the University Union – wrote a long letter of gentle advice to the home team's speaker, Roland Wilson. The First Speaker, Brigden advised, should justify their contentions on pragmatic grounds, as pragmatic grounds are always the most persuasive. Only the Second Speaker should resort to principles. 'Whatever you do don't cram for the debate. You should have finished with all those textbooks and things which I gave you ... Above all be careful to have no weak points. The great fault in debating is to include too many arguments, the weaker of which your opponents sieze upon.' Brigden appended a three-page speech by way of suggestion. 'Our little University will, I am sure, come well out of it. They may, you know, be holding us cheaply' (NLA JBB 3 May 1925).

Wilson went into battle against two luminaries of 1920s Oxford. The Oxfordians' first speaker was Christopher Hollis, a one-time President of the Oxford Union, later an editor of the *Tablet*, an author of a long study of the Tichborne Claimant, and a close friend of Roy Harrod.²¹

Wilson was affirming 'That the principle of compulsory industrial arbitration on the part of the State be approved'. The University library was crowded. The debate 'most entertaining'. The Oxfordians advanced 'an easy flow of words and ready wit'. Wilson replied in a 'telling manner' (*Mercury* 6 May 1925). The negative won.

²¹ The Tichborne Claimant was Arthur Orton, a butcher from Wagga Wagga, who persuaded many who should have known better that he was Sir Roger Tichborne, the missing heir to the title and estates of the Tichborne family.

Figure 2.1. Wilson about to depart for Oxford

