

MOORE, David – lawyer and top public servant

OBITUARY: Commercial lawyer a human rights advocate

- By Matthew Moore



David Moore sailing across the Atlantic.

DAVID MOORE, 1922–2015

WHEN NSW Labor premier Neville Wran appointed David Moore as the state’s most senior public servant in 1979, The Sydney Morning Herald splashed the story across page one with the headline “Ex-protester to be top public servant”.

Then-opposition leader John Mason went on the offensive, claiming Wran’s decision to make Moore chairman of the NSW Public Service Board was “one of the most blatant political appointments in the history of NSW”.

Mason claimed Moore was a well-known member of the Labor Party. He was wrong.

When Wran defended the appointment with customary vigour on the floor of Parliament, he highlighted the contradictions in Moore’s life.

Moore had indeed been a protester, but he had also led a flourishing commercial law firm.

He stood up for his beliefs.

When apartheid South Africa's all-white Springboks toured Australia on their 1971 rugby tour, Moore made an anti-apartheid sign and went to the SCG, where he was a long-time member.

Alone with his sign, he stood outside the members' stand where the cream of Sydney's legal and business community, many of whom were friends and clients, were left in no doubt about his views.

Six years after that protest Wran enticed Moore out of his successful law practice to make him the state's first chairman of the Anti-Discrimination Board.

As Wran told Parliament, Moore had earned his right to protest. He'd served six years in the Royal Australian Navy from 1940 to 1946, including four years in the Mediterranean (where he was shot in the head), and in Britain and Papua New Guinea.

Moore had signed up for the war when he turned 18, after finishing high school at Shore where he'd boarded with his brother, Hugh.

Their chance to attend the prestigious school was thanks to the generosity of their English aunt, Marian Moore, because the Moore boys were born into modest means.

David Moore was born on July 7, 1922, in the Hunter Valley, the second son of Theodore Moore, an unsuccessful small businessman, and his wife, Jennie (nee Sedgwick). Childhood was a simple house in the Newcastle suburb of Mayfield. Holidays were spent camping at Seal Rocks, where they travelled by bullock dray laden with food and tents for six-week stays.

The day he turned 18, Moore went to the naval base HMAS Rushcutter to join up. After some brief training on how to operate a machine to detect submarines, he was sent to Melbourne and boarded the SS Largs Bay bound for London. It was, he said later, "one of my early love affairs with ships".

He sailed on December 10, 1940, and did not see Sydney again for more than three years. He fought mainly in the Mediterranean, serving on a small ship called Gloxinia with a crew of 70.

Moore began studying law at the University of Sydney while still in the navy. He threw himself into it, graduating with first-class honours.

At university, he met June Robinson, a grazier's daughter from Grenfell, and the oldest of three sisters. She became one of the first women law graduates in NSW.

They married and lived on the north shore, where they had their six children. June was a highly articulate woman with deeply held humanitarian views. She strongly opposed Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and she influenced Moore's thinking.

June never felt at home on the upper north shore and the family moved to a terrace house in McMahons Point.

Moore preferred the harbour to Killara so he could watch cargo ships steaming in and out. He abandoned golf and played squash instead, competing at A-grade into his 50s.

In a partnership with Peter Valkenberg, Moore's legal career blossomed as their firm attracted big clients.

In the Blues Point pub, Moore met Margaret Leiden, who was pulling beers to fund her university studies.

Moore's marriage ended and he moved to Balmain, where he lived with Margaret until he quit the public service board in 1985 and headed back to the sea.

With Margaret, he bought a 28-foot Herreshoff ketch, which they learned to sail together venturing to north Queensland. With their new skills they went to Europe, bought a 35-foot Nicholson sloop, Tenancier. They sailed her to Paris and on through the French canals to the Mediterranean, where they spent several of their happiest years, revisiting many of the places where Moore had served during the war.

They sailed Tenancier home, across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, to the Galapagos Islands before wending their way slowly across the Pacific.

Not long after, Margaret died suddenly aged just 52, leaving Moore devastated. But, aged 81, Moore found new happiness when he introduced himself to Jill Brooks at the Sydney Writers Festival. That began a warm relationship that thrived until his death. He saw Jill almost daily, helped teach her to sail and they shared trips to the Mediterranean and other voyages.

David Moore is survived by Jill and his children, Sarah, Matthew, Lucy, Dinah, Daniel and Patrick.

Footnote by OBA: David Charles Moore started at NBHS in 1935.