

Former supreme court chief justice Jeffrey Miles dead



By [Sally Pryor](#)

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Canberra's legal fraternity is in mourning after the death of former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Jeffrey Miles.

Justice Miles, who died on Monday night aged 83, was appointed to head the territory's highest court in 1985, and remained in the role until his retirement in 2002.

Following his retirement, he continued his work in the law, as an acting judge in the Supreme Courts of both NSW and the ACT.



Former Chief Justice of the ACT Supreme Court Jeffrey Miles. *Credit: Rohan Thomson*

During his time at ACT chief justice, he presided over several high profile cases, as well as negotiating the territory's transition to self-government.

President of the ACT Bar Association Steven Whybrow said Justice Miles would be remembered for being courteous and scrupulously fair.

“He really was a student of the law, and took his position as an arbiter of the law as a very serious undertaking, and was very anxious to ensure that he did justice,” he said.

“He was chief justice through interesting times, and nobody is going to remember it for being an ineffectual, inactive, indecisive, slow. He was a good judge and a good administrator, and I think that all comes from him being a real servant of the law.”

He said Justice Miles was never aloof off the bench or in retirement.

“He always maintained contact with the bar, he was never in the least bit reticent to talk to young barristers, and he was a lovely person,” he said.

“On the bench he could be hard, but I think that was because he was doing such important stuff that he took so seriously.

“But you would not have found a more lovely human being off the bench.”

Close friend John Purnell is a senior counsel who named his chambers after Justice Miles.

“He was here for opening of the chambers and made a speech almost five years ago,” he said.

“We were very close friends - I saw him on Friday.

“He’ll be remembered as a judge who was very effective as a chief justice and as a trial judge, because he got his judgements out in a timely fashion, and very few of them were overturned on appeal.

“He’ll also be remembered as being extremely loyal to his fellow judges as chief justice.”

Justice Miles led an inquiry in 2005 into whether David Eastman, accused of killing ACT police chief Colin Winchester, had been fit to stand trial.

In a 2018 interview with *The Canberra Times*, Justice Miles said the Eastman case had been all-consuming for several years.

“I can say it and I did say to many people - many years went by when never a day passed without me thinking about the Eastman case,” he said.

Justice Miles began his career as a solicitor in NSW in 1958, and became a barrister in 1965.

He spent two years as a judge of the National Court of Papua New Guinea from 1980, until he was appointed to the Supreme Court of NSW in 1982.

He said from the time he was appointed to head the ACT Supreme Court in 1985, he was committed to the job, but he also grew to love Canberra.

“I liked Canberra - I knew it a bit because my parents had lived here, and during the time I was on the bench, I was just caught up in the work, there was no question of going anywhere else, our children were brought up here,” he said.

“When we retired, we still had our house in Sydney, we hadn't sold it, so we thought we'd go back and see whether we'd prefer to be in Sydney or Canberra.

“We did six months in Sydney and we decided no, back to Canberra.”

He was made an officer of the Order of Australia in 1994, and received the Centenary Medal in 2003.

In 2016, he was added to the ACT Honour Walk in Civic.

He is survived by his wife of 42 years, Tricia Miles, his children Anna Sinclair and James Miles, and five grandchildren.

From the ACT Law Society:

▲ The Hon Jeffrey Miles AO

12 February 2019

The Law Society was saddened to learn of the death of The Hon Jeffrey Miles AO, former Chief Justice of the ACT, who died on Monday 11 February 2019. Mr Miles also held judicial appointments in New South Wales and Papua New Guinea and was President of the ACT Branch of the International Commission of Jurists.

The ACT Bar Association have prepared a brief obituary.

Vale The Hon Jeffrey Allan Miles AO

It is with great sadness the ACT Bar Association advises the passing of former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory, The Hon Jeffrey Allan Miles AO.

His Honour was admitted as a solicitor of the NSW Supreme Court in 1958 and was called to the Bar in 1965. In 1978 he was appointed Public Defender in New South Wales. In 1980 he was appointed a judge to the National Court of Papua New Guinea and worked there until 1982 before his appointment to the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

In 1985, His Honour was appointed Chief Justice of the Australian Capital Territory and a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia. His Honour served the Territory as Chief Justice for 17 years until his retirement in 2002. Even after stepping down from the bench, His Honour continued his service to the law as an acting judge and in other capacities until 2007 – a career spanning almost 50 years. His Honour continued to maintain close relations with the Bench and Bar in retirement and was unfailingly generous with his time and commitment to the law and the legal profession. Only a few weeks ago we had the pleasure of His Honour's presence at the Bar Christmas lunch.

On 10 June 1994, The Hon Miles was made an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia for his service to law and to the community. He also received the Centenary Medal in 2003.

Jeffrey Miles was a devoted husband to Tricia and father to James and Anna and a true servant of the law and of the Territory.

Steven Whybrow

President, ACT Bar Association

Members are advised the funeral for The Hon Jeffrey Miles AO will be held Monday 18 February 2019 at Norwood Park Crematorium, 65 Sandford Street, Mitchell ACT, at 3.00pm.

A wake will follow at the Rose Gardens, Old Parliament House, King George Terrace, Parkes ACT.

Footnote (OBA): Jeffrey Miles was a Year of '51 boy, with three First Class Honours and two As in his Leaving Certificate.

Old Boy Jim Hawkins noted, in an email to John McKenzie (School Captain in 1953), of 13 February 2019: "About 5 years ago the University of Sydney in an alumni outreach program held a series of talks given by distinguished alumni. They were held at the Queen Victoria building at 0800 on a weekday. Jeff gave one of these which I attended being one of the few non legal attendees and I had the opportunity of talking with him after the finish of breakfast. He was a nice person and a true professional."

John McKenzie offered these comments: "Jeff (aka, "Jerry") was better known for scholarship, debating and literary ability than sport and his 1st Class Honours, in the L.C. of 1951, were for Eng, French and German. (He had dropped Maths and opted for Economics and History (both "A's").

This could have been a lucky option, as the Gen Maths Paper for that year was reputed, Statewide, to have been ferocious. (Same Examiner set the G.M. Paper for 1953. The "Rosetta Stone" may have been of some use to me - nothing else was. I remember Joe Burraston being incandescent about the Paper - "...*worse than '51!!* etc etc".)

Jeff was 3rd in 1951. Don Barnes and Murray Smith, who came 1st and 2nd that year (respectively) were Maths 1 and 2 and Phys, Chem, French and English guys.

Jeff was one of the Prefects for 1951 along with four of his Junction friends, Brian Thomson, Jeff Cameron, Barry Lobb and Brian Munro.

Jeff's younger brother, Doug, was in either the 5th year of '55 or '56. Doug died a few years ago.