



# Mapping Sciences Newsletter

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## NEWS UPDATE

### Governor salutes mapmakers.

Les Isdale, National President, MSIA

In an address to the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland on the occasion of the Queen's diamond jubilee, the Governor of Queensland, Penelope Wensley AC chose 'to praise and honour mapmakers and maps'. For the report by Ursula Skjonnemand - ABC Local- see <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/02/08/3425797.htm>

'Penelope Wensley AC drew comparisons with mapmaking during her lecture to the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland on the occasion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

"The Queen has plotted a safe course through enormous geo-political, social, economic and technological change and often turmoil," says Her Excellency Ms Wensley.

"In the process, she has created for us all milestones of dignity, grace, duty and service to follow."

The full speech may be heard at [http://blogs.abc.net.au/queensland/2012/02/queensland-governor-speaks-on-the-occasion-of-the-diamond-jubilee.html?site=brisbane&program=612\\_breakfast](http://blogs.abc.net.au/queensland/2012/02/queensland-governor-speaks-on-the-occasion-of-the-diamond-jubilee.html?site=brisbane&program=612_breakfast)



Her Excellency paid tribute to the navigators and cartographers whose achievements in mathematics, exploration, and graphical invention represented the world in a form that was readily comprehensible. Even the earliest maps, such as a 2300BC Babylonian clay tablet, had made the connection from reality to map using symbols still instantly recognizable.

'I come this evening to praise and honour mapmakers and maps'. 'Like many of my generation, she said, I have always found maps almost irresistible.'

The Governor referred to her 40 year career as a diplomat \*, dealing with the management of relations between countries, in which 'I became ever more intrigued by the paradox of maps; how it is that they can lead double lives, some acting as a disinterested representation of the surface features of our planet, and others as a cipher of change over the centuries, tracking geo-political upheavals through the expansion and contraction, appearance and disappearance of those imaginary

lines that we call international borders.’

The Babylonian map, she said, uses symbols that clearly represent mountains, a river valley, and fields. ‘The representation of real space and real features in this way was surely a radical step, as radical as the invention of writing, because expressing information in the form of a map made possible the transfer of knowledge from an individual no longer living to individuals yet to be born, without the intermediary of oral transmission through multiple generations.

And it worked. ‘Maps express this knowledge in a particularly potent form. They harness basic human instincts, locating ourselves in the landscape and not wanting to face the potentially catastrophic consequences of being lost.

‘Maps created a basic language of symbols from the landscape round us that we all instantly understand. No-one who has ever seen a river will fail to recognize its representation on a map ... The range, sophistication and abstraction of that symbolic language grew as mapmaking developed, but that doesn’t disguise the fact that the Babylonian map, for all its simplicity, is a true predecessor of all maps, up to and including those generated by modern day GPS driven technology’.

Her Excellency offered her ‘celebratory Jubilee address’ as a ‘grand tour’ in appreciation of maps and map-making. She spoke of the ‘enormous debt owed to cartographers and mapmakers’ and to the ‘giants of the mapmakers’ art and craft’.

‘And where has all that innovation, art, craft, brilliance and sometimes genius brought us?’ One answer, she said lies in the 2011 OED’s broader and less traditional definition of a map as a diagram or collection of data showing the spatial arrangement or distribution of something over an area. Such is the astonishing diversity of maps and map-making tools in the 21st century that the traditional definition of a map no longer serves ... we now have the capacity to generate maps of a mind-boggling variety of specialized data.

They remind us of ... the enormous debt that our current understanding of our world, our capacity to make representations of it and to find our way round it owe to geographers and mapmakers born thousands of generations ago. (The 1200BC Turin papyrus map) ... would be easily decipherable by a primary school student, provided he or she had been taught the rudiments of geography in the first place.

It was a notable speech to mark a significant historical occasion, enthusiastically received by the members of the Royal Geographical Society, Queensland.

Governor Wensley noted that Queen Elizabeth II is the most travelled monarch of all time and in keeping with the geographical analogies, she borrowed William Shakespeare's quote 'in thy face I see, the map of honour, truth and loyalty'.

"Few, surely - whether monarchists or republicans - would refute the proposition that the Queen has expressed these qualities fully in a lifetime of service to those she pledged to serve, as a young woman of 25 and only yesterday, on the Anniversary of Accession Day, at age 85, she recommitted to serve."

A great night for royalists, and for cartographers.

\* For biography see

[http://www.govhouse.qld.gov.au/the\\_governor/biography\\_Penelope\\_Wensley.aspx](http://www.govhouse.qld.gov.au/the_governor/biography_Penelope_Wensley.aspx)