Over the last generation, the study of the history of political thought has been transformed while there has been a decidedly historical turn to Shakespearean studies. The aim was to explore how far these trends might be mutually informing; by examining Shakespeare’s work in terms of the political issues and resources of his own times and by asking how far works that are often doctrinally evasive, open and multi-faceted should make us reconsider what counts as ‘political thought’. The Conference was conducted with the intention of producing the first edited volume of essays on Shakespeare and the history of political thought. The invited papers fell broadly into two groups, those that concentrated on a specific work, or group of plays and those that dealt with political themes across the corpus.

The format, one typical of HRC Conferences, was highly conducive to constructive and sociable debate: the result was an extremely successful occasion. Each session was devoted to a single paper, and delivery times were kept to 35 minutes to maximise discussion. The quality of the papers, and the critically constructive responses to them encouraged us to believe that in revised form, the papers will provide the core of a cohesive collection that genuinely breaks new ground. The Conference ended with a two hour open session which was itself directed to this end. We now expect finished and cross-referenced essays to be sent to us prior to a formal submission to Cambridge University Press for publication.

Only one of the papers was not written specifically for this occasion and so will play no part of the final product. It was kindly offered at the last moment to compensate for the withdrawal of Professor Iain Wright because of serious illness. There was a remarkably broad coverage with almost every Shakespearean work being mentioned and a large number discussed. Even with an expected concentration on the Roman Plays, the papers were complementary rather than overlapping; this too can be said of the predominant general themes of counsel, corruption, freedom of speech, the active and contemplative lives, misuse of office and the dramatisation of its remedies. The themes of the Conference will be explored further next year at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington.

The Conference was only possible because of the generous support of the HRC, NEER and the University of Sydney, and it only ran so smoothly because of the advice of Ian Donaldson and the administrative expertise of...
Leena Messina of the HRC. Ian’s participation in the Conference was also much welcome. The organization, atmosphere and venue were all appreciated by the organisers and other participants alike. Finally, a special thanks is due to the participants and paper-givers for working so hard to make this the rewarding and productive event that it was. A list of participants and synopses of papers is available on the HRC website.