

The Order of Australia Association-ACT Branch

New Members Reception 18 May 2011

Address by Dr Allan Hawke AC

“LOOKING BACK IN RETROSPECT”

The title comes courtesy of one of my mates, although tautologically I should have added “with the benefit of hindsight”.

I’m a fifth generation local; my lineage comprising a veritable gallery of local pioneer settlers who feature in various books about the district.

My Hawke forbears came to Araluen from Penzance in England in the 1850s to search for gold. My grandfather was one of two steam engine drivers involved in building the old Parliament House, coming to the Molonglo Settlement in the early 1920’s, before settling at The Causeway.

My father Harold, a printer, served in the RAAF during WW11 and was a founding member and long time President of the Queanbeyan RSL.

My mother Lorna descended from the Wark, Beaumont, Blundell and Meech lines; working at J B Young’s Department, now the Riverside Plaza, and later as a Nursing Assistant and Personal Secretary to a number of Matrons at Royal Canberra Hospital. She was a fine tennis player, who played the organ at Christ Church for many years.

Isaac Beaumont and Joseph Blundell were convicts; my heritage benefitting from the UK practice of exporting some of its best talent.

Blundell went straight, Beaumont was a notorious bushranger at Jingera.

Just outside this venue on the eastern side is the Canadian Flag Pole; the very site where Joe Blundell built his cabin in 1841. His 11 children produced 93, leading to the large Blundell clan.

Ike Meech gloried in the title of Queanbeyan Council's "Inspector of Nuisances". Following a few sherrberts at Mrs Walsh's Hotel to celebrate his 75th birthday, Ike walked out the door where he promptly fell down dead on the footpath, the local paper recording "... he was in his usual good health and cheerful spirit".

In 1854, John Gale came to the district as a Methodist missionary. On Christmas Day 1855, Gale was riding his horse across the Limestone Plains to Kurrajong Hill - now called Capital Hill where the new Parliament House stands - when he had a prophetic vision:

"... with the mountains to the south and east and the shimmer from the river, the scene invoked a mental, if not a vocal, exclamation: 'What a magnificent site for one of Australia's future cities!'"

Gale married and came to Queanbeyan in 1860 to establish the region's first newspaper "The Golden Age". It was this pulpit, together with his famous paper called "Dalgety or Canberra, Which?" based on nine factors of indisputable logic that won the day for the Federal Capital site.

Success has many fathers, but John Gale rightly deserves the "Father of Canberra" title and further recognition when we celebrate our Centenary as the national capital in 2013. The irony of Canberra owing that place in the scheme of things to a Queanbeyanite will not be lost on you, particularly given the occasional predilection to bestow the "struggle town" appellation to the city which stands at the centre of the Universe.

Gale, and some of my ancestors, attended the opening of the old Parliament House in 1927 by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York. That's the same Duke who became King George the 6th as featured in the magnificent film "the King's Speech".

I was born at Royal Canberra Hospital in 1948 where the National Museum now stands, the second of three sons - my older brother being John and younger brother Phillip. After a few days, Mum took me home to 13 Bruce Street, where I lived until marriage at the tender age of 29.

After Harris Park pre-school, I went to Isabella Street Infants and Primary before going to Queanbeyan High, where I was School Captain.

Early experiences with the Church of England Boys Society in the Parish Hall, Cubs and 2nd Queanbeyan Boy Scouts at the Showground exposed me to leadership roles and role models.

At various times, I was an Altar Boy at Christ Church, sold papers for the Queanbeyan Age, cleaned windscreens at two local motels, and worked as a plasterer's labourer, swimming pool attendant and coach.

Sport dominated my youth - Aussie Rules with the Tigers, rugby league with the Blues, and union with the Whites in winter; and swimming and athletics in summer. I represented the school and ACT District in some of these pursuits and was fortunate to win a NSW "iron man" State title in lifesaving. That feat is recognised in Queanbeyan's Sporting Hall of Fame, which is to be relocated to Taylor Park in the soon to be opened Heather Blundell Sporting Complex.

I've often wondered what it is about Queanbeyan that has produced so many champions; arguably the most per head of population in Australia.

At High School, many of my contemporaries were of Estonian, Italian, Latvian, Macedonian, Polish, Ukrainian and Yugoslavian descent, their parents having come here after WW11 in search of a better life for themselves and opportunities for their children. They were mostly tradesmen who built Canberra and their dream was largely fulfilled.

We're all migrants really; in the early days of white settlement, largely White Anglo Saxon protestants from Great Britain with a leavening of Irish Catholics. Sport and War fashioned our nascent national character and values - egalitarian, unpretentious, courage, larrikin, laconic, mateship and resilience and phrases like a fair go, fair dinkum, doing the right thing, irreverence to authority, lending a helping hand, ingenuity in the face of adversity, standing together and triumph against the odds.

Much of that applies today, but our narrative is now shaped by the ethnic origins of my class mates and others as we move beyond the

cultural cringe. Just as we opened our hearts to them and became a multi-cultural non-secular society, we should revert to the “better angels of our nature” and welcome those who wish to make Australia home.

Some have observed that you can take the boy out of Queanbeyan, but you can't take the Queanbeyan out of the boy! I'm proud of that.

My memories are all favorable; I lived there for 54 years. I met my wonderful wife Maria at the Rugby Union Club. Our daughter Stephanie grew up there and now works part time at the Hospital, while trying to complete her PhD in Clinical Psychology at the ANU.

It's important as you go through life to remember your roots and remain grounded.

Two lessons might serve to illustrate that point. My father once told me to put my arm in a bucket of water and then remove it. “That's the impression on life that most people make son”, he said. The second came via my great Aunt that I stayed with for some years; she and her husband having no children treated me as their son. One day when I was going on about some achievement, she counseled: “You better not go outside, or the wind will blow the tickets away”.

I suspect many of you will have read Albert Facey's extraordinarily moving autobiography. I've had a most fortunate life, with opportunities to serve Australia's national interests in ways that I could never have imagined.

Teddy Roosevelt once said:

“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing”.

Equally - if not more important is the quality of your relationships. The best things in life are not things!

I want to leave you with another quote from another American President, Calvin Coolidge, which has served as my personal credo:

“Press on. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education alone will not: the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Thank you for listening.

Dr Allan Hawke AC FAICD FAIM FIPAA

Allan’s extensive career in public administration at senior levels includes as Secretary of the Departments of Veterans’ Affairs, Transport and Regional Services, and Defence and he was Australia High Commissioner to New Zealand in 2006.

Dr Hawke is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Public Administration and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management in recognition of his outstanding contribution to public service - also a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. The Australian Financial Review’s “Boss” Magazine, named him as one of Australia’s top 30 true leaders in its inaugural list in 2001 and he was a recipient of the Centenary Medal in 2003. Allan was appointed a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia in the 2010 Queen’s Birthday list for eminent service to public administration - so he is almost a “new recipient”, which together with being an Association member, makes him deserving of a set of OAA glasses!

Dr Hawke served a three year term as Chancellor of the ANU from 2006-2009 and now serves on a range of private and public sector boards. He has conducted a series of Government enquiries, including the recent one into the ACT Public Service - in which we all have a vested interest!

Allan is actively involved in a range of charitable, community and sporting organisations and is well known for his active sense of humour as well as golfing escapades!!