



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

Book Launch
Made to Order: George Thwaites and sons, Colonial Cabinet Makers
by Robert La Nauze

Tuesday 8 August, 2017

Dr Robert La Nauze

Thwaites descendants

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this morning.

Tony and I are absolutely delighted to welcome you here this morning to the launch of Robert La Nauze's beautiful book, 'Made to Order', about the colonial cabinet makers, George Thwaites and sons.

On 30 June 2015, The Hon Alex Chernov AC QC and Elizabeth Chernov moved out of Government House. That same day, we moved in.

During that afternoon, I had not one moment to myself. I was meeting staff, learning my way around at least my most immediate environs, doing a 'walk through' for my Inauguration the following morning, and excitedly welcoming our son who had flown in from London to join us for just a few days.

I finally caught my breath that evening, when all was quiet. The staff had left. The family had 'retired'.

I looked around in disbelief. I had appreciated the honour of the role, the constitutional responsibilities and the opportunities that came with working right across our wonderful State, as well as promoting its economic, social and cultural ties with the wider world.

What I had not fully contemplated was actually living in Government House. More accurately, the feeling of it was not something I could readily reckon upon in advance.

In the hush of that evening, I felt the sense of history.

The history of Governors having contributed good work before moving out. Like the Chernovs had done that very day. And the history of Governors having moved in, full of the anticipation of getting started. As we had done that day.

I was struck by the sense of temporary custodianship of this role. That's a truism I know, and one common to many public office-holders. I know I felt it as a judge. The court is always comprised of its judges. The individual judges come and go, but the court is still made up of its judges at any one time.

But it is rare for a public office-holder to be the temporary custodian of the magnificent edifice in which it, the office, is housed, in addition to the office itself.

And so, I imagined the 18 of my predecessors - and their families - who had come to live right here, as well as 10 others who had moved into former Government Houses.

For many decades, furniture and decorative pieces accompanied their masters when they came here by ship, but those pieces sailed back with them when their Vice Regal posting was over.

Across the years, soft furnishings have come and gone. They, and the décor, have varied according to the taste and the times. Art works have been generously loaned by our NGV, and then generously replaced by them with others.

Tessellated tiles have been covered and uncovered, and carpets have changed in hue. The use of particular rooms has also changed across the ages.

But there have been some constants: in the form of the exquisite furniture pieces made by George Thwaites and sons. And they have been constant from colonial times, bridging the 19th, 20th and 21st across several centuries....so far.

Robert La Nauze's magnificent and scholarly book, that I have the honour to launch this morning, is of course about so much more than the furniture here at Government House. But I am sure that you will forgive my emphasis on these pieces in my comments today.

It is not just parochialism on my part.

First, many of the George Thwaites treasures of which Robert La Nauze writes are, fittingly, right here around us.

But they also tell an important story, beyond just their exquisite craftsmanship.

They tell the story of a Yorkshire-born craftsman who, like so many in the mid 1800's, was drawn to move his family to the promising new settlement of Port Phillip, albeit a half a world from what had been their home.

They tell the story of Marvellous Melbourne and its rapid expansion based on its new-found wealth from gold.

And they tell other stories of the times as well.

For example, that the Government paid George Thwaites £4550 5/- and 6d for furnishings for Toorak House, in preparation for the arrival of Governor Hotham and his wife, and then more again later for repairs and new pieces. (Naturally, there is the twin story too of the vitriolic press coverage in the *Melbourne Punch* about the substantial government funds so paid to Thwaites!)

Mind you, I see that the *Argus* reported favourably on Thwaites, in 1876, when the Governor's new residence 'on the Domain' was completed, noting that the furniture made by Thwaites and son for Toorak House some 20 years before, was being renovated for use in the new building. 'That this furniture should now be fit to be placed in the new Government House speaks well for the makers', it said.

How well then does it speak for the makers that here it is today, more than another 140 years' later, still used and admired by the Victorian community!

We are fortunate that these fascinating stories, (and many others outside of Government Houses), have been captured by Robert La Nauze in this wonderful book.

We have not only the benefit of his incisive research, but also his engaging writing, and very beautiful and detailed photographs.

Thank you Dr La Nauze for what you have created.

Thank you to all of you too who have joined us for this launch, with a particular acknowledgement to the descendants of George Thwaites.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the production of this book, including our own Melanie Miller, whom I know was a great help to the author in the course of his writing, as she has been such a wonderful resource to this House in her sensitive curation of these treasures for more than 15 years.

I am delighted that some of the next generation of cabinet makers are with us today. May you be inspired by the craftsmanship and beauty you see on display.

That leaves me only to say that, with great pleasure, I officially launch Robert La Nauze's book, *Made to Order: George Thwaites and sons, colonial cabinet makers*'.

I would now like to invite Robert La Nauze to address us.