



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Tuesday 21st May 2019

Dr Graeme Blackman AO, representing Mr Peter Watts AM, Chair, and all Trustees of The WR Johnston Trust

Mr Louis Le Vaillant, Director and Curator, The Johnston Collection

Volunteers

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 evening.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you all here this evening to celebrate 20 years of the Volunteer Program that has helped the Johnston Collection to flourish.

We often talk of organisations that are dear to our hearts. The Johnston Collection is certainly one of them, but it is, most particularly, dear to our eyes as well. It is, after all, around us in various parts of this beautiful House.

I am sure that everyone gathered here knows of the history of this collection. How after he died in 1986, the prominent 20th century antique dealer, collector, and property investor, William Robert Johnston, generously bequeathed his collection of beautiful furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objets d'art* to the people of Victoria, and created a Trust to hold his East Melbourne home, Fairhall, as an exhibition-house.

You know too that since 1990, his Collection has been, in accordance with Johnston's wishes, shared with the Victorian public at Fairhall.

You know how the home and the beautiful collection are one, so visitors can feel immersed in the era –participants, not just spectators. And you know of the lectures, the guest artists and curators and – not to forget – the gift shop!

This museum is a terrific contributor to Victoria's reputation as 'The Creative State'.

We can be grateful at Government House for a connection that saw the development of a close relationship with the Johnston Collection. The late Tom Hazell AO, as Deputy Official Secretary in the Office of the Governor from the late 1980's, forged the link that saw long-term loans from the Collection to the House, and long-term storage by the House for the Collection.

You will see some items this evening: the George III Mahogany dining chairs in the Billiards Room, Georgian style mahogany knife boxes in the Dining Room and the Victorian walnut, marquetry and gilt credenza in the Ballroom Entrance Vestibule, for example.

We acknowledge William Johnston and his generosity.

But this evening, we gather to single out a particular group for celebration.

The Johnston Collection volunteers. And they come in many guises.

For the past 20 years, volunteers have guided visitors through Fairhall, and the Collection. They have offered a warm and friendly welcome, adding to the homely atmosphere, and adding to the visitor's experience with the charming stories that they share about the furniture and objects on display.

Volunteers have also contributed so very much 'back of house', helping to care for the Collection, and assisting with administration.

Volunteers have formed 'The Friends' group. An integral part of the Johnston Collection.

The Friends – also 20 years' old this year – support the Collection's work through events and fund-raising. And at this 20 year mark, there is much to note with pride, including some \$420,000 raised from their efforts.

And then there is also 'The Ambassadors' group. The ones who advocate and champion the Collection in the wider community, and the Opening Doors fundraising committee, who have raised significant funds to add to William Johnston's endowment.

The first Johnston volunteers were in fact the Trustees. I like to emphasise that, because – as in other not-for profit organisations – Johnston had and has a cadre of board members or trustees selflessly volunteering considerable time and considerable skill.

I am sure that across the years, many of you from those groups will have visited us here at Government House and noted some of the Johnston Collection that we have on show. Many will have visited too on Open days to help 'man' the space when we display special pieces.

This evening, it is our turn to look after you. To allow you to relax. You are off duty!

We hope that you will enjoy looking around. But please do let us specifically thank you for all that you do to enable the Johnston Collection to flourish and to delight so many Victorians, and visitors from further afield.

Congratulations to Director/Curator, Louis Le Vaillant, the staff, the volunteers and those whose special contribution will be recognised this evening.

Every one of you contribute to make the Johnston Collection a living and breathing part of our museum scene, and William Johnston's legacy an enduring one. And, how timely it is that I can add a special congratulations to you for gaining Australian Museums accreditation in just the last fortnight.