



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

MELBOURNE CLUB MEMBERS AND DAUGHTERS DINNER

Friday 2nd August 2019

Mr Richard Balderstone, Vice President, Melbourne Club

Members

**Daughters, Grand Daughters, God Daughters, Step-Daughters,
Daughters-in-Law and Nieces**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

A few months ago, I asked a friend, a member of this Club, if he could tell me a little about the history of the Club, as I was preparing to say a few words for this evening's dinner.

I did not understand just how much he would warm to the task, until he delivered to my door, your Club History. That is, what I thought was your Club History.

As I blanched under the weight of it, I realised that this was not your Club History as such – at least, not your full Club History. It dealt only with the period 1838 to 1918! Although I could barely lift it, it still had 101 years left to go, just to reach current times!

So, please don't test me on its finer details: I may not have digested every word of it.

I did read enough though, to be struck by the Club's long history, and how it runs parallel with so much of what has occurred across that time in our State.

That makes me observe that, similarly, the history of my role runs alongside the last 180 years of what has happened right here and across what later became known as Victoria.

And so, I thought I might reflect a little on some of the more interesting parts of the Governor's role across the State's history.

I emphasise that I am not proposing a long, didactic walk through the history of each of the 29 Governorships of the State. I hope it won't disappoint you to hear that! More just an idiosyncratic look at some snippets of relevant history.

On 4 February 1839, my predecessor, Charles Joseph La Trobe was announced as Superintendent of what later became Melbourne but was then known as the Port Phillip District of the Colony of New South Wales.

It is worth pondering, for just a moment, what the settlement was like, into which this young Englishman, La Trobe, arrived.

Although the land was ancient and the culture of the indigenous people was rich, the newly formed District was a just a smelly village, and the social systems of the settlers still rudimentary - at best.

As your Club's Social History records so succinctly:

It was a time marked by rough manual work, a lack of civilised amenities and the absence of the ameliorating influence of women.

By the way, I note that 3 months before La Trobe's appointment, and into that chaotic town, the Melbourne Club had already been born!

Although I feel the link across the more than one and a half centuries between La Trobe and myself, I am also well aware of the manifold differences between us.

They start with something as simple as our respective arrivals to take up the role.

To travel from London to Melbourne, Charles La Trobe and his Swiss wife, Sophie, travelled some four months by sea to Sydney. There, they waited a further two months before a ship could sail for Port Phillip. Upon arrival, stormy weather forced them to wait on board for yet another three days, before they could then be rowed up the river to the settlement of Melbourne. Once ashore, they had to wade through unmade streets of mud.

On 1 July 2015, when I was inaugurated into the role, Tony and I drove to St Kilda Road from, well, a little further down St Kilda Road. It took 10 minutes.

Another difference. Whilst the La Trobes arrived with a small prefabricated wooden house to be erected on 'a suitable spot in the Government paddock' – as he put it – we arrived through the splendid gates of Government House.

Ironically, that was thanks to the vision of La Trobe himself, who was the one to set aside the land for the Governor's house, high on the Domain Hill.

Although naturally I have my own aspirations for what can be achieved in this role, I doubt that any Governor could have an impact that equals what Superintendent, later Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe achieved in those early times.

He was a man of vision. A community builder.

It was during his watch that we saw the foundation of the Royal Botanic Gardens, University of Melbourne, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne Cricket Ground and our State Library, amongst many other organisations.

All this, and so much more, from a 38 year old man who came to this side of the world and to this embryonic village, with little managerial or administrative experience. Mostly, he had travelled and climbed mountains, and written books about those adventures!

I spoke of the complex circumstances of his arrival in 1839. The circumstances of his departure, some 15 years later, in 1854, were even harder.

In 1852, after 13 years in Australia, Sophie La Trobe, in poor health, longed to be with her family in Switzerland.

La Trobe submitted his resignation to London in December 1852, but waited for a successor. The position of Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria was difficult to fill, and it was almost eighteen months before he was free to leave the colony.

Meanwhile, he had insisted that his wife and children return to her family home in Switzerland, to wait there until he was free to join them.

Eight days before he was finally due to leave Australia, La Trobe opened a copy of the London *Morning Post* which had – after its own long journey - just reached Melbourne.

There, he read the notice of his wife's death.

If I turn my mind to what life was like for La Trobe and some of the colonial Governors who followed, I can say that I am relieved to be the Governor at a time of a written constitution, legislation that clarifies powers and a time of well practised governance and stable government. I can reflect – with the utmost sympathy – on the complexities of the role for the early Governors of a fledgling colony. A fledgling colony whose numbers swelled so dramatically with the discovery of gold in the early 1850's.

You know we talk about our rapidly growing State today. And we do live in the most rapidly growing part of Australia. Melbourne will soon be our nation's biggest city.

We talk too – rightly – of our rapidly growing economy. Victoria has experienced 25 years of year on year growth, and outstripped the rest of the country for the last 5 years.

And we talk of our massive infrastructure program – the biggest of any State, with more than \$100 billion committed.

But we should not overlook the exceptional growth experienced during the Gold Rush.

Our population swelled six-fold from under 100,000 to a massive 540,000 in just the decade of the 1850s. Our economy quickly became one of the richest in the world. We needed every imaginable form of infrastructure to support that explosion of population.

And, although the discovery of gold brought great wealth, it also caused enormous social upheaval, including a mass exodus of labour from the small city of Melbourne to the goldfields, disrupted families and a high crime rate.

Trying to cope, La Trobe imposed a direct tax, a monthly licence fee to search for gold. In doing so, he alienated most of the men in the colony.

Our first Governor, Sir Charles Hotham RN KCB, arrived in 1854 into all those challenges of the Gold Rush.

The finances of the colony were in disorder, and the problems on the goldfields escalated with his enforcement of the mining licence laws. We know of course that things spiralled downwards towards the dramatic events of the Eureka Stockade, just 5 months after his arrival.

Governor Hotham died within a year of the Stockade. It is said that he caught a chill while opening the Melbourne Gasworks. He was only 49, and had been married for just two years at the time.

Poor Governor Sir Henry Barkly KCB, our second Governor, then bore the brunt of political instability.

In his six and a half years in the role, he had to contend with eight different administrations. It makes the last decade or so of Federal politics look quite serene.

It was never going to be easy for Governor Barkly, but perhaps the burden was eased a little in that he received the highest salary in the Empire. The Colonial Office considered the posting here to be so particularly hard!

Before moving from the time of our Colonial Governors, I want to mention our 5th Governor, Sir George Bowen GCMG with just two observations.

The first is about his career. In 1859, he started an 8 year term as the Governor of Queensland. That was followed by a 5 year term as the Governor of New Zealand. He then served more than 5 years as the Governor of Victoria, before becoming the Governor of Mauritius - which was before he became the Governor of Hong Kong! That is a lot of Governorships!

The other observation is not so much about Governor Bowen, but rather about Lady Bowen. And about an idea that I think could be, at least from my perspective, happily re-introduced.

When Governor Bowen was to leave Victoria for his post in Mauritius, the ladies of Melbourne presented Lady Bowen with the gift of a diamond and pearl tiara in the shape of a wreath of daisies.

A few years ago, I met several of the Bowen descendants. They confirmed that the tiara exists, although now separated into various pieces of jewellery shared within the family.

In any event, by the time Governor Bowen left Melbourne, at the end of the 1870's, a truly golden era had commenced.

Melbourne had developed an international reputation as one of the greatest cities in the world. Writers like Mark Twain and Anthony Trollope waxed lyrical about it.

In 1885, British journalist, George Augustus Sala dubbed it *'Marvellous Melbourne'*, a title enthusiastically adopted at the time. He also wrote of it as a city that *'teems with wealth'*.

Melbourne was indeed enjoying a land and property boom, which had been building since the 1850s. We had cable trams, electric lights, magnificent public buildings, (some of which surround us here), and we were hosting major international exhibitions that showcased us to the world.

The wealth of the times was certainly apparent in Victoria's Government House.

The building of the House had been completed just a few years earlier in 1876. In fact it was Governor Bowen who was the first to live there after previous Governors had lived at Toorak House, (now the Swedish Church in St Georges Road, Toorak), or, for a very short time, at Bishops Court in East Melbourne.

As an aside, can I say that at first the House – the large, stately and gracious House of which we in Victoria are so immensely proud - was not well received.

The Age newspaper declared at the time that Government House *'throws all the other public buildings into the shade by its surpassing bulk and ugliness'*.

And the Governor himself wrote home that *'The new Government House is ruinously expensive and quite a 'white elephant''*.

Anyway, in the two decades before federation, Government House was the scene of much lavish entertaining.

The Melbourne Cup, first run in 1861, was certainly at the heart of the city's social scene.

In 1886, Lady Loch, wife of Sir Henry Loch, GCMG KCB Victoria's 8th Governor, described what she called *'the whirl of Cup time'*.

A whirl indeed! By 1892, The Right Hon the Earl of Hopetoun GCMG and Lady Hopetoun were hosting not only one, but two full-scale Cup Week Balls for up to 2000 guests each. And in addition – a large garden party for 3000 people!

There were many newspaper reports of these *'very gay functions'*, and much printing ink devoted to descriptions of the women's expensive gowns, their *'diamond ornaments'*, and even of the practice favoured by some of the women, who adorned their hairdos with gold dust.

Before I leave the topic of those Colonial Governors, I note their close connection with this Club. Close, but sometimes complex, largely depending on the particular issues of the particular time.

The relationships ebbed and flowed a bit, but your history shows that they were frequent guests – if not members.

Pertinent to the overlapping histories of my role and the Melbourne Club is the fact that one of the earliest ‘events’ hosted by the Club was a reception, held to welcome Superintendent La Trobe. He then became a Club member and later the Club’s Patron.

A number of the subsequent Governors were given a Welcome Dinner, but were apparently not sufficiently popular to be offered a Farewell Dinner upon their leaving! It varied.

The close connection between Governors and this Club did extend beyond Federation and of course, the Governors-General then became popular guests as well. Your history recalls many welcome and farewell dinners.

Your history also records that an outgoing Governor or Governor-General often used the evening as an opportunity to give an account of their stewardship, to discuss the future of the state or the country – and importantly, to defend themselves against their critics!

As you know, with Federation in 1901, Victoria became the seat of the new Federal Government, until Canberra was established.

Amongst other things, that meant that Lord and Lady Hopetoun lived in our Government House on two separate occasions, first when he was Victoria’s 8th Governor, (from 1889 to 1895), and then again, when he was Australia’s 1st Governor-General, from 1901 to 1902.

That means that still today the Hopetoun influence is felt around the House. The turquoise and gold tones of the Ballroom are said to have been chosen by him, and are referred to as ‘*Hopetoun blue*’.

Something interesting about Lord Hopetoun. He was just 29 years’ old at the time he took up his role as our Governor. In fact he was just 40 when he became our Governor-General. I guess that, by comparison, some of us are great under-achievers!

Talking about Federation, there is a quirk in our House – a memento, if you will – from those days in which Australia’s Governors-General lived there.

Although it is of course Victoria’s State house, and although – quite properly – the State Chair has engraved across its back, ‘Advance Victoria’, etched into the glass above the Private Entrance are the words ‘Advance Australia’.

As a proud Australian, I cannot see anything fundamentally offensive about that, but it certainly is the surest sign that Government House Victoria had a period when Vice-Regals -other than Governors of Victoria – lived there.

Then came the heartache and disruption of The First World War.

One positive connection with Government House is that the Australian Red Cross was born inside our House.

Lady Helen Ferguson, wife of Australia’s 6th Governor-General, Sir Ronald Ferguson KT GCMG PC, was a founding member.

The Ballroom at Government House was used by the Red Cross for some of the war years for the storage of goods sent in by local branches. Women sorted and packed parcels to be sent to our troops overseas.

It was used again in the Second World War, when it served as a venue for the making of surgical gowns and bandages.

After the Great War, the next major historical influence on the role of the Governor was, without doubt, the Great Depression.

When Governor Lord Somers KCMG DSO MC left Victoria in June 1931, he was not replaced for almost 3 years. And when, at around the same time, the Governor-General moved to his premises that were then ready in Canberra, our Government House stood empty.

Interestingly, the State Government decided to temporarily accommodate the Melbourne Girls' High School, (later renamed Mac.Robertson Girls' High School), which was in disrepair and in need of a new site.

And so, between 1931 and 1933, Government House opened as the Melbourne Girls' High School with 756 students.

How lucky were those girls to have their assemblies in the Ballroom, their art classes in the State Drawing Room and what was then a polo field for their sports!

In the interests of time, let me fast forward and paraphrase the 70 plus years after the second world war.

Of course, I am FAR too young to have a direct memory of all of the post-war changes. I am though 'mature' enough, to have grown up alongside many of them.

But let me just touch upon how the face of Victoria, our Governors and Government House have changed across the last half of the 20th century and during the first one fifth of the twenty-first.

It is a fascinating thought that it was only when the Honourable Sir Henry Winneke AC KCMG KCVO OBE was appointed in 1974, that we had our first Victorian born Governor of Victoria.

Interestingly, Lord Huntingfield KCMG, the Governor who had finally arrived in Victoria in 1934, was in fact the first Australian born State Governor. He had been born in Queensland, where he had then spent his childhood years before moving to England. He had no connection though to Victoria.

Doesn't that speak volumes about the history of Australia, of Victoria and of my role!

The Governors that have followed Governor Winneke have also spoken volumes in reflecting how our State has changed.

Indeed, Dr J. Davis McCaughey, AC, our 23rd Governor, inaugurated in 1986, was born in Northern Ireland.

Professor the Hon David de Kretser, AC (the 27th Governor) was born in what was then Ceylon, and the Hon Alex Chernov AC QC, the 28th Governor was born in Eastern Europe.

The Hon Sir James Gobbo, AC CVO QC (our 25th) was born in Carlton to Italian parents, and he and his family briefly returned to live in Italy during his childhood.

Today, almost half of all Victorians were either born overseas or have one parent born overseas. I am one of that half. My father was born in Europe, and came to Victoria from Europe when he was a teenager.

I guess you could say that the face of our Victorian Governors has changed once again, more recently.

I am, of course, the first female in the role.

That means that, in addressing this fathers and daughters dinner this evening, there is something that sets me apart from the Governors across history who have preceded me.

It is safe to say that I am the only one who has been a daughter!

And so, although as the parents of two sons, Tony and I have not had the opportunity to parent a daughter, as a daughter myself, I know well and truly what my father wanted for me.

Naturally, he wanted me to be able to realise my full potential, to be able to contribute as fully and as widely in whatever it was that I chose to do, to be treated fairly and respectfully and to be able to succeed without unfair obstacles placed in my way.

I know that there is not a father amongst you this evening – nor a grandfather, godfather, uncle or father-in-law – who wants less than that for your loved ones.

And I know that what you wish for them is what we all wish for our State's future success.

We share the understanding that, for maximum success in a competitive and rapidly changing global environment, our nation needs to find innovative ways to identify, analyse and solve problems.

We need to be able to call upon a diversity of life experience and thought.

And to be best placed to do that, we need the contribution of 100% of our talent pool. Not just a half of it.

I started my comments this evening with the arrival of Charles and Sophie La Trobe. It is interesting to contemplate how things have changed for women in the more than a century and a half since the La Trobes arrived here.

Of course they would be struck by the significant – in many instances, unimaginable – changes. But I suspect that if Charles La Trobe, that man of vision and action, were transplanted into this contemporary context, he would be surprised by the slow pace of change on this score.

He would see that even in 2019, we still count so many of women's roles in the 'ones'.

Since his departure from Australia 165 years ago now, we have had only one female Prime Minister. One female Governor-General, one Victorian Premier, one Victorian Governor, one Chief Commissioner of Police– and one female jockey who has won a Melbourne Cup!

And, even when we can count in more than ones, the figures are still very low.

Of course, La Trobe would also see many promising signs.

Fifty percent of Victoria's Cabinet Ministers are women, as are 42% of the Victorian judiciary and more than 50% of government board members.

Whilst there remains a significant gap in pay parity for Australian women, I am proud that the gap is smaller in Victoria than in other parts of the country. But we do need it to keep decreasing.

When I look at the group here this evening, of course I am struck by the obvious: the shared joy and pride of the members here with their daughters or the other extended family who are dear to them.

I hope that you share the optimism that I feel when I see the wisdom and talent amongst these women.

I know that they will, in their many and varied ways – as so many of the men in this room have done – contribute magnificently, in accordance with our State motto - to Victoria's *peace and prosperity*.

I shall enjoy watching them!