

**CLAREMONT DAFFODIL AND SPRING FLOWER SHOW**  
**OPENING SPEECH BY MRS FRANCES UNDERWOOD**  
**SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2013**

Good afternoon everybody, and thank you to the Claremont Flower Show Group for inviting me to open this long-lived and highly popular Show.

What is it about daffodils? On the way back from the airport, after a recent trip overseas, we turned into Lower Domain Road and came upon the Government House paddock covered in daffodils of every shape and hue sparkling under the oak trees. My heart leap and I savoured the moment of.....was it optimism, gratitude, hope, beauty; of being connected to something bigger than myself perhaps. In short daffodils are always an uplifting sight. As Wordsworth put it in his poem that I am sure you are all familiar with:

Beside the lake, beneath the trees  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze  
Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle in the milky way  
They stretched in never ending line  
Along the margin of the bay.

I gazed -- and gazed but-- little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought.  
For oft when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the Daffodils

It appears from the excellent history supplied by Treasurer Peter Hepburn that it all began for your group back in 1985 when it was decided to hold a Spring Flower Show in Claremont. This event was a one day affair, held on the first Saturday in September. The venue was the Sunday School Hall behind the Uniting Church in Wyndham Road and it was such a success it was decided to repeat the Spring Show the following year. Peter says that that was even more successful than the first Show. It was held at the Uniting Church Hall and so many exhibitors turned up that entries spilled into the back of the Church. It was nearly impossible to move in the Show Hall and Afternoon Tea in the back of the actual Church was “almost a bunfight”<sup>1</sup>.

Thereafter the Spring Show has gone from success to success. 1987 witnessed the arrival of major daffodil exhibitors from all round

the State. The President of the English Daffodil Society assisted with the judging and said that he had never seen anything like that level of public support at an English Daffodil Show. Nine years later the Claremont Spring Show was visited by a group of members of the American Daffodil Society.

It was not long before the incredibly energetic volunteers who formed the Claremont Flower Show Group turned their attention to a summer Show as well. In January this year the Group held its 21st Anniversary Lily and Summer Flower Show and today is the 29<sup>th</sup> Daffodil and Spring Show which makes it a total of 50 Claremont Shows since that first Show way back in 1985. A triumph, I say and a tribute to the hard work and innovation of those volunteers. The continued success of the Claremont Spring and Summer Flower Shows is a testament to the importance of community events.

The story of horticultural activity and showing goes back to the early decades of Van Diemen's Land. In the very beginning, of course, mere survival meant that crop production was just about the most important activity in the colony. Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1834 was an auspicious day in the life of Hobart because on that day opened the first ever Hobart Town market. There were 30 stalls, grouped by type in groups of ten – vegetables and poultry, fish and meat, flowers, and miscellaneous trades and so on.

Here is what a newspaper said, and I quote:

“There is one description of inviting articles for sale in the new market, which we think will insure the frequent visits of the ladies if nothing else does (and if they attend of course they will form a grand attraction to induce all other classes of buyers to follow). We mean a regular display of all the choicest flowers of the season, both indigenous and exotic, as well gathered for bouquets as with roots in flower pots, similar to the *marché aux fleurs* at Paris and other towns on the Continent. There is something so soothing and innocent in the contemplation of a beautiful flower (and this island is distinguished for its splendid variety) that we shall rejoice to see a taste of this kind spring up and flourish in Hobart town. A few shillings spent in so delightful an enjoyment, independent of the encouragement it gives to the industrious poor, cannot be said to be thrown away.<sup>ii</sup>

Actually, that same newspaper ran a most unflattering book review some years later on the subject of flowers, and I’m afraid your daffodil didn’t escape. Listen to this:

“Somebody has published a book under the quaint title of “An Hour with the Hollyhock.” We confess we have not much curiosity to read the work, for we cannot see how sixty minutes

spent in the company of a rather vulgar looking plant can afford matter of either an amusing or instructive character. We would much rather have ‘Five Minutes with a Pine Apple’, or even ‘A Moment with a Peach’, or ‘A Quarter of an Hour with a few Apricots’. The language of flowers is all very well; but we do not believe the biggest hollyhock, or the downiest of daffodils, can have anything to say of itself that would justify any reasonable being in giving up even half an hour to its society.”<sup>iii</sup>

But I digress ...

In 1839 the newly formed Hobart Town Horticultural Society held its first exhibition at Pavilion Point, the site of today’s Government House. And in 1843 Lieutenant Governor Eardley Wilmot, set up the Horticultural and Botanical Society of Van Diemen’s Land which the following year became Royal Society of Van Diemen’s Land for Horticulture, Botany, and the Advancement of Science. The rest as they say is history; a noble and learned history.

The Claremont Flower Group is now a part of that history and its floriculturists’ passion for flowers will ensure that the Group continues to add to the store of knowledge about, and the development of different species of flowers for many years to come.

And it would seem , as the newspaper predicted about the place of flowers in the new Hobart Town Market, that *many* have rejoiced “to see a taste of this kind, spring up and flourish in Hobart town” and it would also seem that the author of the unfaltering book review was misguided for it appears that “the downiest of daffodils”, has a great deal to “say of itself “ so much so in fact, it has inspired poets from William Wordsworth to Ted Hughes to give up many hours to its society.”<sup>iv</sup> and to speak most eloquently of its gifts. I leave you with a reflection from the poet Ted Hughes; he had bought a patch of wild land and when he visited it with his wife, the poet Sylvia Plath, he was surprised to find it covered in daffodils.

The daffodils

Were incidental gilding of the deeds, treasure trove. They simply came,

And they kept on coming.

As if not from the sod but falling from heaven.

Our lives were still a raid on our own good luck

We knew we'd live forever. We had not learned

What a fleeting glance of the everlasting

Daffodils are.

Every March since then they have lifted again

Out of the same bulbs, the same

Baby-cries from the thaw

Ballerinas too early for music, shiverers

In the draughty wings of the year.

And on that note I happily declare open the 2013 Claremont Daffodil  
and Spring Flower Show.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> Notes attached to email dated 22 August 2013 to David Owen.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> The Hobart Courier Thursday 20 March 1856 page 3. Quoted from “English Punch” magazine.

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