

REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT THE UNVEILING OF A PLAQUE TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY OF THE OPENING OF THE CYGNET TOWN HALL, CYGNET, SUNDAY 19TH JANUARY 2014.

Centenary celebrations are always important occasions and my wife and I are privileged to have been asked to join with the citizens of Cygnet to commemorate the centenary of the opening of what may be described as the most important community building in this area. Today, my wife and I follow in the footsteps of a predecessor of mine, The Right Honourable Sir William Ellison-Macartney, KCMG, who was the Governor of Tasmania from 1913 until 1917. On 22nd January 1914¹, 100 years ago, Governor Ellison-Macartney, accompanied by his wife and son, stood where I am standing today and officially opened the Port Cygnet Town Hall. According to the Mercury newspaper published the next day,² His Excellency and his family travelled from Hobart to Port Cygnet on board a war ship *HMAS Warrego*. No warships for us, I am afraid but, of course, 100 years ago the roads between Port Cygnet and Hobart were primitive, to say the least, and the quickest way to travel to Cygnet in those days was by water, the journey for my predecessor taking no more than an hour and a half.

In his address to open this Hall 100 years ago, Governor Ellison Macartney said that “the Municipal Council had only been in existence some six years, and [had] crowned their already many useful achievements by providing the people with a splendid public hall, and one which he hoped would add much to their enjoyment.” He went on

¹ The date was originally fixed for 20th January 1914 but was postponed to 22nd January according to an item in the Huon Valley News for Saturday 3rd January 2014. See: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/titles?state=Tasmania> accessed 13th January 2014.

² Mercury Newspaper 23rd January 1914, page 6; accessed 13th January 2014. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/884779?zoomLevel=1>.

to say, "They could point to it as the seat of their local government, which [he felt sure], would be a wise and good government." Of course, if Governor Ellison-Macartney was here today Mr Mayor I am sure he would say "I was right about the local government being wise and good!!" But in any event my predecessor certainly was right when he went on to say that "Every district needed to be provided with a public hall." On that opening day, there were many speeches, a reception, said to have been attended by 3,000 people³, afternoon tea and, in the evening, there was a concert.

Well, His Excellency's hope has been fulfilled for, over the last 100 years this public hall has indeed been useful and has provided members of the local community with much enjoyment. A country hall like this one often is, as this one is, the heart of the community. It is the place where local residents come to socialise, and to support one another. It's the place where local residents come to grieve together in times of loss and to celebrate in times of success. It is a place where local residents come together to listen to music, to look art, and to be entertained. It is a place where local residents meet to discuss and debate issues that concern them all; truly the heart of the Cygnet community. Soon after this hall had been opened, people came here to watch the *Biographs* or silent movies, accompanied only by a pianist. When the movies arrived in the 1930's, people from Cygnet and nearby came to this hall to watch and listen - and - no doubt, in the case of some of the then young people, where they came to take advantage of the security of the darkness of the back row to enjoy an evening of amorous pursuits.

³ Ibid.

There is a pictorial record of the first Cygnet Apple Queen sitting on her throne on the stage in this hall in 1931, surrounded by 32 children and 31 adults, all dressed up in their best dresses and suits - with a singing group called the "Joy Spreaders" in the foreground - and the Cygnet Dance Band are there too, posing beside the grand staircase. In the days when Balls were popular, this hall welcomed those who fancied themselves as ballroom dancers and those who hoped that here, they would find true love. Also welcomed were those who came to the Balls just to sit at the edge of the dance floor and watch, and admire, and criticise and speculate. What tales this hall could tell, if it could only speak; the smiles it has seen, the laughter it has heard and the tears that it has seen shed.

On this special occasion, I am pleased to see that although this heart of Cygnet has been going strong for 100 years, it is showing no sign of slowing down. On two Sundays a month, the hall gives shelter from the cold and wet to those who provide the unique and vibrant Cygnet Market. I am told that St James College uses the hall for their annual May Ball, Cygnet Primary School uses the hall each year for their final concert and assembly, and last weekend the town hall reverberated to the sound of many performers during the Folk Festival.

Local Government did not come to Cygnet until 1908⁴. Mr Fitzpatrick who, as a matter of interest, was the first person in the district to import a motor car, became the first Warden when the Council took office in 1908⁵. Within a mere six years after inauguration the Council had built a court house and then this hall. The foresight,

⁴ A brief history of Cygnet by Jean Cockerill. <http://tw.w.id.au/cygnet/history.html>. Accessed 9th January 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

capacity and industry of the first Warden, councillors, and staff are to be admired. With great respect to my predecessor, Governor Ellison-Macartney, to describe all that as “useful achievements” is an understatement.

The foresight and courage of the first councillors of what was then the Port Cygnet Municipality enabled the people of Cygnet to use, tend, and nourish their hall for 100 years and, in return, during the same 100 years this hall has welcomed, supported and brought together the people who make up the community of Cygnet and its surrounds. It’s a wonderful story. With the benefit of hindsight, the hall is much more than a useful achievement. It is the heart of the community. Long may that heart continue to beat strongly.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I unveil the plaque that commemorates the centenary of the opening of the Cygnet Town Hall.