

**LAUNCESTON CLUB VICE-REGAL DINNER**  
**SPEECH BY**  
**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC**  
**GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**  
**THE LAUNCESTON CLUB, TAMAR STREET**  
**WEDNESDAY 24 AUGUST 2022**

Thank you very much, Jen, for your welcome and your invitation to this dinner.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

The Loyal Toast reminds us all of our inheritance of our Westminster system of governance, with a Head of State, and recently, the Office of the Governor-General which has become involved in questions of how our unwritten conventions are managed.

Naturally, I make no comment about the specific actions of our former Prime Minister. However, in the fourteen months in which I have been in office as Governor, I have twice considered matters of contention, namely approval of prorogation of our Parliament, arguably a Reserve Power, each time drawing the attention of the opposition. My predecessor as Governor, Kate Warner, also approved a prorogation that drew some controversy. Politics as usual, you may shrug, they test each other all the time. But in taking on this role, a Governor needs to be mindful of the occasionally delicate nature of acting automatically on the advice of Ministers. Of course, even where a Governor is required to act upon advice, a Governor has the right to be consulted, to encourage and to warn in respect of such advice.<sup>1</sup>

Some of you may also recall the late Peter Underwood causing some controversy when he invoked a Reserve Power after the 2010 State election and installed a Labor-Green Government. That decision – which he set out in detail and published – continued to be debated for some time. Some of those same constitutional law experts have been commentating on the recent Scott Morrison controversy.

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<sup>1</sup> *The English Constitution*, Walter Bagehot, OUP 1942 at p67.

So – a Governor isn't always nibbling canapes, cutting ribbons and coming to lovely dinners, as some of my friends like to suggest!

Of course, there are those who question the need for and value of a highly paid individual living in a 71-room mansion overlooking the River Derwent. And they have every right to do so, in our democracy. Others – by far the bulk of Tasmanians – have never been in Government House or really have much of an idea about the role of their Governor.

So, one way we have been attempting to increase public awareness of my office is by opening access to Government House without the traditional invitation to attend an event.

This opening has been expanding for some years, with weekend hiring of our heritage tennis courts and the bowling green/croquet lawn; weekly tours of the House and of the gardens; some cottages are available to rent, though in great demand; and we now have various products for sale, including Government House Estate wines and gin, Kitchen preserves, publications, particularly the two-volume history of Government House, and shortly, a calendar.

And Don chairs a senior staff committee developing an ambitious, but well overdue, adaptive reuse project, to convert some original 1850s workshops, stables, coach house, loft and other buildings to become a museum, interpretation centre, gift shop, and café for visitors.

This project will increase access and bring people closer to Government House and the meaning and relevance of a modern Head of State. All the income raised will be used for selected heritage maintenance projects.

Maintenance projects are never cheap. May I give you one instance of what I mean by "selected" projects. Set high in our Ball Room's east wall are six large panes of frosted glass, circa. 1857. These were installed by an English architect worried about Australian sunshine entering the highly ornamented Ball Room. The six panes are fragile and the wooden frames in which they are set are corroding at the edges. So, the panes are of unique heritage value, and are potentially dangerous.

However, I have little confidence that my Official Secretary could successfully go to Treasury Secretary Tony Ferrall for seventy thousand dollars to repair some panes of glass that aren't yet broken!

In the little over fourteen months that I have been at Government House, there really have not been many idle moments. Don and I have made many regular trips north – including the two-day Launceston official visit earlier this month. We look forward to many more visits north, not least the remaining official municipal visits until all 29 are completed later in my term.

Travel is integral to my role as Governor. There is an amusing tale of Charles Du Cane, Governor between 1869 and 1874 when visiting a Tasmanian country town. Large numbers of horsemen would ride out to meet the official party when a few miles from the town, in order to lead in the official party. Du Cane wrote that the official party was, and I quote:

“given the full benefit of the terrific dust storm raised from the sandy road by their horses’ hoofs ... I looked on the dust as an estimate of the loyalty of the [greeting party] by the density of the cloud they could succeed in raising.”<sup>2</sup>

End of quote!

This leads me on to the most noteworthy historical fact. Less than ten years later after Governor Du Cane’s term, in January 1882, your club was formed, as the Launceston Club. To be celebrating your 140<sup>th</sup> year in 2022 is an historic and truly commendable achievement. Through the efforts of your members, particularly the office bearers, you have ensured the ongoing success of the Club.

I was amazed to read that, in your archives, you have every minute book written since that first one in January 1882, and that they remain in good condition.

Our Government House records indicate – as yours will also – the Launceston Club was a very popular Vice-Regal haunt in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Our records indicate that in November 1915, Sir Harry Barron, Governor of Western Australia, paid a return visit to Tasmania after his four years here as Governor between 1909 and 1913. He stayed at the Launceston Club<sup>3</sup> and had interacted with the Club on numerous occasions during his Governorship. In January 1911 it is recorded somewhat cryptically, he and the visiting

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<sup>2</sup> *Government House Tasmania: A Remarkable Story*, page 264.

<sup>3</sup> *Examiner*, Friday 12 November 1915 page 6.

Governor-General Lord Dudley, quote, “spent part of the evening at the Launceston Club”.<sup>4</sup>

Our records also record visits and stays at the Launceston Club in July 1916 of Governor Sir William Ellison-Macartney, in March 1919 of Governor Sir Francis Newdegate and in April 1921 of Governor William Allardyce.

Vice-Regal dinners and residences at the Launceston Club increased – so much so that by March 1937 the official Launceston visit of Governor-General Lord Gowrie included the following, which I am very pleased to include for what it says about your Club.

Having been welcomed on arrival by many thousands of citizens, the Governor-General took a march-past salute from a Town Hall dais; had refreshments in the Mayor's Room, chatting with aldermen; after which Lord Gowrie, accompanied by a military escort, quote, and I emphasise, “proceeded to the Launceston Club, which is his headquarters in the North.”<sup>5</sup>

This does suggest that the much-proposed northern Government House was there for the taking!

May I conclude with a final notable historical reference from the *Mercury*. In December 1933, Governor Sir Ernest Clark stayed here at the Launceston Club – “where he was entertained at dinner by members” – Lady Clark stayed at the Brisbane Hotel,<sup>6</sup> no doubt because of the Club’s “men-only status”.

Your Club had the foresight and good sense to admit women as members following a number of special meetings during 2000 and 2001. The first female members were admitted in August 2001. In 2002, a proposal was made to the Lady Franklin Club, formed in 1957 for women, to amalgamate with your Club, and the members of both Clubs agreed to this. In 2003, the members of the Lady Franklin Club became members of the Launceston Club.<sup>7</sup> This makes you pioneers, relative to Hobart and elsewhere in Australia, in welcoming female members. As Tasmania’s second female Governor, I am sure you will not be surprised that I say “well done and keep up the excellent work!”

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), Monday 23 January 1911, page 7.

<sup>5</sup> *The Mercury*, Thursday 4 March 1937, page 7.

<sup>6</sup> *The Mercury*, Tuesday 5 December 1933, page 8.

<sup>7</sup> A Brief History of the Launceston Club Inc.