

FRIENDS OF THE BURNIE REGIONAL MUSEUM INC
80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST COLLECTING EXCURSION OF
MUSEUM FOUNDER PETER MERCER
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
BURNIE REGIONAL MUSEUM, WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2022

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this acknowledgement and celebration of the first collecting excursion of Peter Mercer, founder of the Federation Street at the Burnie Regional Museum.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and connection to sea, land and culture. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

I would also like to acknowledge:

- Tom Bearman, representing the Honourable Felix Ellis MP, Minister and Liberal Member for Braddon
- Mayor Steve Kons and Councillors
- Julie Harris, President of the Friends of the Burnie Regional Museum
- Members and supporters

I thank Julie and the Friends of the Burnie Regional Museum for your kind invitation to join you and to say a few words. This is my first visit to the Museum as your Patron.

I am looking forward to viewing the exhibits and sharing in the celebration today. The Federation Street exhibition is especially interesting in its presentation of the lives of ordinary residents of Burnie more than a century ago. The exhibition is replete with personal treasures, memorabilia and tools of the trade that bring the street to life with examples of the businesses around Burnie at the time.¹ The Exhibition “captures the city and region’s past in lifestyle, culture and architecture.” Federation Street was researched, planned and created by Peter Mercer and is based upon Kirkgate Victorian Street in York, England.

¹ <https://www.burniearts.net/Venues/Burnie-Regional-Museum> accessed 6 Oct 22

According to the Museums Association in the UK, museums can *'increase our sense of wellbeing, help us feel proud of where we have come from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate us, and make us feel healthier.*

*'Museums can transform lives. They can also enhance aspirations and opportunities, by breaking down barriers to access and inclusion. They can encourage public participation, engaging with diverse communities, and sharing collections and knowledge.'*²

Museums also offer particular educational benefits for children. It has been said that *'children and museums go hand in hand, though not always willingly'*.³ Children form a significant audience for the stories and objects contained in museums across our nation, whether as part of a family outing or a more structured school excursion. Children learn from the objects and stories in Australia's collections.

Education is a key part of the mission of museums, galleries and libraries. They have extended their school education services into the early childhood years, expanding programs and resources for children from four to 18 years.⁴

On a personal note, it is clear that this museum has a lasting impact on students who attend. My permanent Aide-de-Camp, Paula Duniam, who grew up here in Burnie, still has fond memories of school trips to the Burnie Regional Museum!

We are here, of course, to acknowledge and celebrate the 80 years since the first collecting excursion of founder Peter Mercer.

Peter began his working life as a dairy farmer on the north-west Coast of Tasmania. He was successful in that role. However, he always had a passion for history, historical writing and developing museum collections. He turned that into a lifelong obsession and career. He developed an interest in collecting from the age of two, when he picked up shells and other marine specimens from beaches and rocks. Then at the age of seven and a half, he established his own little museum. So, it was a very early start for Peter. His private museum has formed the basis of the collections of the Burnie Regional Museum. Peter

² <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/the-impact-of-museums/#> accessed 6 Oct 22

³ http://www.nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/_lib/pdf/Understanding-Museums_Education_visitors.pdf accessed 6 Oct 22

⁴ http://www.nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/_lib/pdf/Understanding-Museums_Education_visitors.pdf accessed 6 Oct 22

founded the Museum, which dates back to 1971 and was officially opened as the Burnie Regional Museum in 2011.⁵

Peter has been prolific in his collecting. This morning when researching for a speech for Friday, I even found in a book, "Thylacine," written by our Government House Official Secretary, David Owen, an acknowledgement to the Peter and Elizabeth Mercer Tasmaniana Collection, Jane Franklin Hall.

Along the way, Peter has authored several books on the history of Tasmania, as well as numerous papers, historical papers and his memoirs.

Peter retired in 1999 after 23 years as Senior Curator (History) at our Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. On 12 June 2000, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia 'for service to the promotion and preservation of history, particularly through the Burnie Pioneer Village Museum and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery'.⁶

The Federation Street exhibition is now open three days a week with the assistance of volunteers from the Friends of the Burnie Regional Museum. May I acknowledge and thank you for the great service that you provide, facilitating access to a collection of regional, national and international significance.

Thank you all for your wonderful work.

We shall shortly hear from your President, Julie Harris, but may I close with a quote from Wendy Beckett: '*A country that has few museums is both materially poor and spiritually poor ... museums, like theatres and libraries, are a means to freedom.*'⁷ The Burnie Regional Museum is certainly "a means to freedom" and makes us richer as a community.

Thank you.

⁵ <https://www.burniearts.net/Exhibitions/Permanent-Exhibitions/Federation-Street-Exhibit> accessed 6 Oct 22

⁶ <https://honours.pmc.gov.au/honours/awards/1136877> accessed 6 Oct 22

⁷ https://www.azquotes.com/author/21920-Wendy_Beckett accessed 6 Oct 22