

BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF *THE WOODBRIDGE*, TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
***THE WOODBRIDGE*, NEW NORFOLK, SUNDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2025**

Good morning, everyone. I am delighted to be in our beautiful Derwent Valley today to mark this bicentenary of *The Woodbridge*, one of Tasmania's oldest heritage-listed buildings.¹

I acknowledge the palawa people as the traditional and original owners of the land on which we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

It was in 1825, that convict labourers laid the first stones of *The Woodbridge*. It was built for Thomas Roadknight, the first Chief District Constable of New Norfolk, for the cost of over 1,000 pounds. The Chief Constable's ownership was short-lived when in 1827, he was sent to Sarah Island after he shot a servant.²

The Woodbridge was then sold and converted into Richmond Hill Academy, a school for young gentlemen.

In 1832, an advertisement in the *Colonial Times* described Richmond Hill Academy as, I quote, "finished by the Proprietor at a very considerable expense, commanding the most delightful and extensive views of the surrounding country, very advantageously situated for water carriage, being on the Banks of the Derwent, with Pleasure Grounds, and excellent Fruit and Kitchen Gardens, in full cultivations".³

¹ <https://www.historicstays.com/the-woodbridge-tasmania-new-norfolk-hobart>.

² Ibid.

³ *Colonial Times*, Tuesday September 25, 1832.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8646675?searchTerm=Richmond%20hill%20academy%20tasmania>

In 1834, the Assistant Surveyor General, William Sharland, purchased the property, which stayed in the family until 1905. It then passed between various owners until it fell into disrepair.

From its early grandeur to disrepair at the end of the 20th century, the historic outbuildings and Dutch barn were demolished for the nearby bridge roundabout. The fate of *The Woodbridge* seemed sealed.

However, in 2003, Laurelle and John Grimley laid eyes on the dilapidated and damaged building, and the remarkable chapter in *The Woodbridge's* story of resurrection began. The Grimleys' vision was for an extensive and sympathetic restoration that has become a fine example of our local craftsmanship. As the project progressed, layers of history were discovered — including the convict lockup, original convict-built French drains, hand-cut stone walls, and original doors, windows and fireplaces.⁴

Laurelle and John's restoration employed many skilled tradespeople from the Derwent Valley and surrounding areas. The restoration created valuable employment opportunities and stimulated the local economy. The Grimleys' commitment and dedication to this project produced outstanding work and won both State and national recognition — the Housing Industry Australia Restoration of the Year Award in Tasmania and the Australian Restoration of the Year in 2006.

Today, *The Woodbridge* is a valuable reminder of the importance of preserving our heritage. As we celebrate this bicentenary, may *The Woodbridge* continue to welcome visitors, share its stories, and encourage our next generation to protect our cultural heritage.

My congratulations to Laurelle and John, and all those who have contributed to ensure that *The Woodbridge* remains a valued part of our Tasmanian history.

Thank you.

⁴ Ibid.