

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO OPEN THE LONGFORD
BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS, LONGFORD,**

SATURDAY 1ST MARCH 2014

Thank you very much for inviting me and my wife to join you to celebrate Longford's 200th Birthday and thank you for inviting me to formally open the event. I am hoping that things will start better for me today than they did when I was asked to open another event not so far from here. It was shortly after I was first appointed to the office of Governor. The event was being held outdoors, like this one, and I had just begun to speak when the public address system broke down. A techie was close by and hurried over and fiddled about with some plugs and wires and then said it was OK to go. I was a bit unsure about that and, being new to the job, I leaned into the microphone and said very clearly, "Can you all hear me now?" and a man sitting on a chair in about the middle of the crowd called out, "I can, but I would gladly swap places with someone who can't"!!

Now in 1843, that's just 29 years after Longford was founded, Lieutenant Governor Sir John Eardley-Wilmot arrived in the colony. In those days Van Diemen's Land was regarded as part of the colony of New South Wales and was governed by a Lieutenant Governor who was answerable to the New South Wales Governor. The then good citizens of Longford - some of their descendants are no doubt here today - decided that they would write a letter of welcome to the new Lieutenant Governor. It ran like this:

“To His Excellency Sir John Eardley Wilmot, Baronet, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land and its Dependencies.

May it Please Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned, land and householders and others, inhabitants of the District of Longford, beg to testify our loyalty and affection to Her Majesty's Government and person, by congratulating her representation on his safe arrival amongst us.”

Well, that was nice and gracious isn't it? And as we drove up from Hobart I anticipated being greeted in similar fashion and in much the same terms. The greeting was friendly but “G'day Gov” from a man at the gate wearing a fluoro vest, and “Yous can park your car over there...” could not be described as being in the same terms as Sir John was greeted in 1843.

The letter from your ancestors to Lieutenant Governor Eardley-Wilmot continued:

“The great majority of us are old colonists, who have witnessed many important changes in the general condition of the community, but it has never been our lot to welcome the Ruler set over us, by our most gracious Sovereign, in so low a state of our agricultural and commercial prospects, or under so great a pressure of general and individual distress.”

So, 200 years ago farmers up here were doing it tough. Nothing changes. But the letter also had an optimistic note:

“We do not, however, despair that the bounty of providence ... and the gradual development of safer principles of enterprise and traffic will restore our prosperity.”

And concluded with these words:

“The wisdom and discretion of the Government in its executive and legislative capacities will, doubtless, materially assist [us] in effecting it; and to this end, as well as in all measures [that wisdom and discretion will be] fitted to advance our moral, civil, and social welfare, we shall ever be glad to co-operate with your Excellency.”

Now there *is* a change. Here we are in the middle of an election campaign but so far, has anyone heard anybody use either the word ‘wisdom’ or the word ‘discretion’ in conjunction with the word Government??! Nor, in the same context, has any one heard either the expression ‘material assistance’ or ‘measures fitted to advance our moral, civil, and social welfare’. As for ‘cooperation’ !!

But let me read to you a short description of Longford published in the *Launceston Examiner* for Saturday 10 May 1884 at page 1:

“For the visitor to get a comprehensive view of Longford and surroundings he must go to the gentle hill on Mr McKinnon’s property, and a really pretty picture presents itself to the landscape painter, particularly if the evening sun glints the rugged mountains in the distance, with kaleidoscope tints in

saffron, rose and pink, to vary into mauve, with an atmospheric haze blurring the deep ravines – the intervening middle ground dotted here and there with snowy homes, nestling ‘midst deciduous foliage and nearer still, the pretty village gives life and animation; if not with busy streets, the wreathing smoke tells of the housewife’s toil and homely hearth. Close by, two iron girders span the river for the rails, and a viaduct in brick arches crosses the duplex streams. Spread out in the foreground, the [translucent] water reflects in [blue] tints the autumnal shadows that here and there margin the stream. The picture is complete when listless cattle browse on the herbage, or lazily drink. For a second pretty landscape, notice that to the right, in passing over the wooden bridge to reach the previous view; distance - middle and foreground - are happily blended, with here and there a lonely tree to give perspective.”

So, on this bicentennial celebration of Longford, we can look back and reflect that, although some things have changed, the really good things about Longford, its beauty, its tranquility, its close community and the genuine warmth with which its visitors are greeted, have not changed one whit in all those 200 years.

Congratulations for organising this splendid celebration go to Mayor Kim Polley, the Councillors, Acting General Manager - Maree Bricknell and also to the Chair of the Organising Committee, Cr Jeff Carins and, of course, to the Committee itself.

To all the good people of Longford, my wife and I say “happy bicentennial” and now, let the celebrations begin/continue.