

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD
AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO CELEBRATE THE
SESQUICENTENARY OF CRESSY DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL,
SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER 2013**

What a great day this is for Cressy and of course, for the Cressy District High School celebrating its sesquicentenary. Thank you for inviting my wife and me to join in the excitement of the occasion.

You know that when Mrs Hollingsworth wrote and invited me to open this event it brought back a memory of another time when I had to give an address to students. It was before I was the Governor and when I was the Chief Justice of Tasmania. The students were not primary school students but a newly formed group of law students. Actually, I thought my talk went down quite well. People laughed at the right places and nodded wisely at the serious message that I wanted to convey and clapped enthusiastically at the end. On the way out the President who was escorting me to the door asked me how much my fee was. I asked him what he meant and he said the fee for the talk. I was taken aback and looked horrified. I drew myself up to my pompous best and lectured him that Judges don't ask for fees to deliver speeches, especially to law students as it is part of a judicial officer's duty to do that sort of thing etc. etc. and he said "Oh that's good because we don't have much money and we're saving up to get someone really good to speak next year."

I am sure that this won't happen to me today as I open the centenary celebrations. 1863 is a long time ago. White settlers first came to the north of Tasmania in 1804 when Lieutenant William Paterson established a base at what is now George Town. With respect to Cressy

I am informed by the Cressy Local District Web site¹ that 40 years after Paterson set up that camp the first building was erected in the area of what was to become the township of Cressy. It was – of course – a pub. Called the Cressy Hotel, it was built in 1845, and my information also is that after the passage of no more than another 18 years the Cressy school was founded. Exactly one hundred and fifty years ago.

But being a cautious lawyer I went looking for the written evidence to prove that the school was founded 150 years ago. At first, all I could find was a two-page document bearing the crest of the school and called “Summary of History”. The first paragraph of this piece of paper asserts that in 1838 John and Olivia Hodgetts joined other concerned citizens and began designing and building a small chapel, 3 kilometres south of Cressy and that this building was used as a Church on Sundays and a school during the week. The second paragraph of this document asserts that in 1863 the Cressy State School was opened next to the Anglican Church. But I could not find any evidence to prove that either of these statements is correct.

Given the unlikely circumstance that in those days a chapel would be built before the pub I thought it should look into this a bit further.

As I did so I found that by the time Governor Franklin arrived in the Colony in 1837 there were nearly 30 small independent schools across the State, invariably set up by one of the Churches.² Records of them are scanty, mainly because few lasted very long. They were often held in the teacher's house, and were frequently of low standard.³

¹ <http://www.cressytasmania.com/> accessed 19th October 2013

² http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/E/Education.htm accessed 19th October 2013.

³ Supra

Indeed, that trusty newspaper, the Cornwall Chronicle for Saturday 14th of October 1848 reported with respect to the then Cressy School:

“The inhabitants of and about Cressy complain of the inattention of the schoolmistress to her duties. The school seldom, assembles until eleven o'clock, and often the children are kept standing in the rain half-an hour before the door is opened, and then are admitted to a cold, damp room. This is not as it should be:⁴

I am sure that nothing like that happens today at the Cressy School but I thought that's odd; The *then* Cressy School – in 1848? But it wasn't founded until 1863 or, I began to wonder, is it possible that this 150th anniversary is perhaps at least 15 years too late. I decided that I should delve even further.

As I did, I learnt that Governor Franklin, or more likely his wife, the well-known Lady Jane Franklin were way ahead of their time for they, saw the importance of education and tried to encourage the establishment of schools in the colony and in 1838 Governor Franklin established a Board of Education which, according to historian Michael Sprod, provided subsidies to what was called “'free day schools' [which were] organised on a district basis by committees of local officials and respectable inhabitants.”⁵ And so that is how state funded primary school education started in Tasmania. The system was partly funded by parents – a penny a day – and partly funded by the State.

⁴ The Cornwall Chronicle Saturday 14th October 1848

⁵ Supra footnote 2.

However, according to a lengthy article in the Cornwall Chronicle for 23rd December 1848 the whole system foundered at the end of that year, just 10 years after the state system had started. The report said this:

“With the Christmas vacation terminates the existence of the Board of Education Schools – 26 in number – and by this step a saving of £2,153:15s in salaries, and of £707 in rents of school-houses will be effected; at the same time, 1,908 scholars will have to procure other means of instruction, or remain without school teaching.”

But, you might say to me that happened in 1848, and that was long before 1863 when the Cressy School was founded. The state system must have started up again and I agree, but in the middle of that report in the Cornwall Chronicle describing how some schools were too small and should have been closed to save money – does that ring a bell? – was this extraordinary statement:

“The Cressy School is another case in point, but the salary and rent paid there (£125 for teaching 17 children) was too much; whether, however, it was the wiser course to discontinue that allowance altogether, or to reduce it proportionately to the circumstances of the neighbourhood, it is not difficult to determine. The school will probably be broken up, as the reduced pay is not enough to maintain an efficient teacher without other emoluments.”

As I read that, written in 1848 - 15 years before 1863 - I thought that maybe the Cressy School existed back in 1848 and was then part of the state education system?

I asked myself how could that be? You see I know that Mrs Hollingsworth and her talented staff run a very progressive school that has rightly earned an incredibly good reputation and I know that they willingly embrace valuable projects like the Beacon Foundation and the Duke of Edinburgh Award, as well as run worthwhile programmes such as the leadership classes for senior students and a Birth to 4 years programme. There is no doubt that the Cressy District School is a top Tasmanian School. And I thought can it be possible that this anniversary *is* at least 15 years late? Is it possible that the school that John and Olivia Hodgetts started up in the Chapel in 1838 was taken over by the Board of Education at some time between 1838 and 1848; dare I even say is it even remotely possible that Mrs Hollingsworth is mistaken as to the date?

Well I can tell you that despite my further researches I was unable to find strong evidence to confirm that 1863 was the founding year for this school, but I expect the evidence is out there somewhere but I lacked the skills to find it. Then I thought anyway, there is a great deal to celebrate about this wonderful school that has certainly been here for more than a century and a half, and the part it plays in its local community so I wish you all a great day here and open the celebration with an invitation.

I invite any secondary school student who is interested and who has the time, to engage in his or her own research to see what evidence

they can find to remove any doubt that it was founded in 1863. I will invite the student who produces the most persuasive case - the strongest evidence - that the School was founded in 1863 to bring his or her class down to Government House in a bus that I will pay for and have lunch there with me and Mrs Underwood.