

**UNVEILING A PLAQUE TO COMMEMORATE THE
CENTARY OF THE OPENING OF THE PALAIS THEATRE AT
FRANKLIN BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, SATURDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2012**

Thank you very much for inviting me and my wife to join you at this centenary celebration of a grand old building. We arrived here as did so many people when this building was erected - by boat, rowed by six oarsmen. It was an exciting start to the afternoon, although I have to confess that we had to resort to more modern transport from the wharf to here as I understand that the horse and cart were on strike.

According to the Mercury newspaper for Thursday July 4th 1912¹

“Final arrangements were made yesterday in connection with the opening of the new Franklin Town Hall by the Governor, Sir Henry Barron. His Excellency will be greeted by a guard of honour of cadets and school children. After inspecting the children and cadets, His Excellency will be presented with an address of welcome by the Warden (Mr. D. E. Ryan). The Huon Municipal Council is to give a public reception, and at 5.30 a banquet is to be held in honour of the Governor's visit. A concert is to follow. Proceedings are to be wound up

¹ [http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/10232724?searchTerm=Governor Barron Franklin&searchLimits=](http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/10232724?searchTerm=Governor+Barron+Franklin&searchLimits=) accessed 29th October 2012

with a ball. A holiday is to be given the school children and an effort is being made to obtain a bank holiday”

And so it came to pass on 10th July 1912 - one hundred years ago - this fine building began its life as the home of a Municipal Council, the seat of local government and a centre for community gatherings of all kinds. The Huon Times for Saturday 13th July 1912 waxed lyrical about the opening event noting that the building and its furnishing cost a staggering £2,500. But pointed out that the floor space in the main hall was 70 feet X 40 feet, the stage was 40 feet X 25 feet giving a total air space which exceeded by 1040 that of the Hobart Town Hall. I am not quite sure what that means, but the message clearly was that this is no country hall but a truly magnificent building, far grander than the then Town Hall of the capital city.

In his opening speech Sir Henry Barron remarked that he hoped that during the evening he would hear sing a Franklin lady whom his wife had heard sing and with whose voice Lady Barron had been charmed. Rather strangely you might think, His Excellency went on to say:

“Music hath charms to soothe a hog
An angry butcher or a butcher’s dog”

He then made a hasty attempt to recover the situation by saying:

“Without [you] being any of those things I think that you all feel the charms of music and therefore the district would be distinctly happy in possessing a building where they would have the facilities for the enjoyment of good music.”

Governor Barron also noted that the new hall was a building to which young people could come in the evening and enjoy each other's society. He did add however that it was an “astonishing circumstance that in the scale of charges for the use of the hall political meetings were placed lowest on the list for he saw that people could go there and talk politics for 5 shillings a night.” !!

Well, this fine old building has seen many changes in its 100 years. Seventeen years after the ceremonial opening, the seat of government moved to Huonville and the Hall was used as a picture theatre for many years. Technology killed off local cinemas, but the Hall was still used as a community centre up until the nineteen-eighties, a place where amateur theatrical productions were mounted and a place where balls, concerts and other community events were held. However, eventually every home had a television set, the road between Franklin and Hobart was much improved and this splendid building that had been launched with great fanfare in 1912 largely fell into disuse, being used only occasionally for badminton, a youth club and later a Sunday food and craft market. Vandalism and

disrepair reached such a stage that there was talk of demolition but this was fortunately fended off by the establishment of the Palais Management Committee of as sub-committee of the Council and to whom we all owe a large debt of gratitude for it was substantially due to their efforts, especially those of Paul Abbott and Lloyd Griffiths, and a work for the dole programme that saw this elderly but distinguished building restored to health.

Progress was such that by the end of 2000 the building was ready to be reopened and the Governor at the time, Sir Guy Green, came to Franklin to preside at a reopening ceremony and attend a grand Ball that evening which, I am told, captured the atmosphere of the great Balls that were held in the Palais years earlier. You just can't keep a Governor away from a good opening you know - or dare I say - a good centenary celebration!

Although Sir Guy reopened the Palais Theatre work on its restoration was then far from complete and it continues to this day. Thanks go to so many people for that work. There is the Huon Valley Council; there is John Young who was Chair of the Palais Management Committee back in 2000, and David Sales who has been Chair of that Committee since 2003 and all the members of that committee; there is Martin Riddle, the Vice-Chair of the Palais Management Committee and Chair of the Centenary Celebrations Committee and his hard working sub-committee plus all the other volunteers.

As it says on your web site:

“The works to-date have generated renewed community interest and pride. The important cultural role of the Palais Theatre, formerly neglected and a target for vandalism is now recognised. It is once again being used for the purpose its original builders intended: to bring the community together and add to the quality of life of the people.”

It’s a wonderful achievement by a community that has worked together for a common goal. On this centenary celebration I congratulate you and have great pleasure unveiling this plaque to commemorate this occasion.