

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (TASMANIA)
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MONDAY 3 MAY 2021

Good morning and welcome to Government House to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the National Trust in Tasmania.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and yet continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

It is a great pleasure to be able to celebrate 60 years of operations of the National Trust in Tasmania, formed in 1960 to acquire Franklin House a fine late Georgian house on the outskirts of Launceston.

And speaking of Launceston, Mrs Joan Green from Launceston was among the acceptances for this event. Joan, who is 96 years of age, took the minutes at the first meeting of the National Trust and has been actively involved ever since. Unfortunately she has been admitted to hospital and so was unable to travel down from Launceston today to be part of this celebration. I am sure everyone here will join with in sending our best wishes to Joan.

I thought I would begin by saying something of Government House, built between 1853 and 1858 and considered to be one of the best Vice-Regal residences in the Commonwealth.

Construction of Government House on this site is very much a story of false starts. Old Government House stood where Elizabeth Street now descends from Macquarie Street to the waterfront. It was a ramshackle affair. Lieutenant Governor Arthur wrote that when he arrived in 1824,

The building was in such a ruinous state on my entering it that Colonel Sorell assured me he was always in the greatest alarm when it blew hard, fearing it would come down and bury his family in the ruins.

Arthur therefore obtained permission from the Colonial Office to build a new Government House and chose this as its site. Work began but when Earl Bathurst received the plans and estimates he wasted no time in ordering cessation of all work on the grounds that it was far too grand and expensive.

His successor, Sir John Franklin and Lady Franklin commissioned new plans and selected James Blackburn's design. The foundation stone was laid in 1840 in a ceremony attended by Captains Ross and Crozier of the Erebus and Terror. By 1843 the architect, a former convict James Blackburn, had been replaced by Franklin's nephew, William Porden Kay who was appointed by Franklin as Director of Public Works and Colonial Architect, a position he held until 1859. Kay modified Blackburn's plans and construction continued only to be abandoned yet again when Franklin was recalled and Sir John Eardley-Wilmot replaced him in 1843 with orders to suspend the unauthorised construction of the new Government House.

Sir William Denison, Lieutenant- Governor of Van Diemen's Land from 1847 until 1855, and Lady Denison, were not at all happy with their dilapidated Government House and planned a new one.

In July 1852 Denison wrote to his mother:

I am going to commence a new Government House upon the site originally selected in the Domain and I intend to have such a garden; such warm terraces in an old quarry, where fruit and flowers can be grown to any extent. My successor, whoever he may be, whenever he may come, will have reason to be grateful to me.....

Denison re-engaged William Porden Kay who drew up new and more modest plans. It is likely that Sir William Denison, a military engineer, and known to be an interventive administrator, would have provided adequate advice to Kay during planning and construction.

Government House is built of sandstone of two colours: the darker yellowish stone with a pecked surface, used for the main wall surfaces was quarried on the Domain. The paler stone, creamy grey, used for quoins, mouldings and carved details was from the existing quarry on site, and subsequently became the quarry pond, now a significant feature of the garden.

Local timbers were used for the joinery, Welsh slate for the roofs and furnishings were ordered from Trollope & Sons in London who also supplied the decorative schemes for the main rooms.

The first Governor to reside at Government House was Sir William Fox Young (1855-1861) who moved in with his family in January 1858. Only ten rooms were habitable and the Ball Room remained a workshop for many months.

There is so much more that could be said about the House, but I shall leave you to read about it in our forthcoming publication!

Government House today is testament to meticulous conservation and maintenance over its life time. It continues to be a working building not only for those employed here but also for the many visitors who come here each year.

Tasmania retains approximately 40% of Australia's built heritage which is a vital part of what makes Tasmania the special place it is. The National Trust has played an integral role in ensuring many Tasmanian sites and properties have not been lost in the development race and equally importantly, a number of significant heritage properties now belong to the community and are enjoyed by the community.

I would like to congratulate both successive boards of the Trust as well as the many dedicated volunteers for the work they have done for the last 60 years to ensure Tasmania's heritage is protected. National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) is not alone in finding the preservation of built heritage into the future a significant challenge but it is a challenge which must be overcome.

Thank you.