

NEW NORFOLK HISTORICAL INFORMATION CENTRE
30TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION: "MEMORIES OF THE DERWENT VALLEY"
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, NEW NORFOLK, FRIDAY 4 MAY 2018

Good morning and thank you for inviting Dick and me here today to open the 30th anniversary exhibition of the New Norfolk Historical Information Centre.

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

May I acknowledge among you:

- Councillor Martyn Evans, Derwent Valley Council Mayor and colleagues Julie Triffett and Paul Belcher;
- Mrs Ruth Binny, NNHIC Chair.

And congratulations to Melissa Smith, Arts Tasmania Roving Curator, for her work in facilitating workshops over some two years, with Information Centre members and volunteers, in selecting the items for the exhibition. It would no doubt have been a significant undertaking to whittle down and arrive at the ten selections, chosen for being of special significance to the people of the Derwent Valley.

I should begin by saying that the Vice-Regal connection to the Centre is a strong one! New Norfolk was my home for more than 40 years until I was appointed Governor and it was Dick's for his whole life. I will make some personal observations about that shortly.

And as many of you will know, the New Norfolk Historical Information Centre was opened in its original public library location in 1986 by then-Governor Sir James Plimsoll. I don't have a record of what Sir James said at that opening, but I can tell you that he greatly enjoyed meeting Tasmanians from all walks of life and he did so by constantly travelling to exhibitions and openings and the like, no matter how small or out of the way. So his 1986 visit here would have been ideal for him.

Indeed the Premier at the time Robin Gray remarked that, and I quote him, “One could hardly go anywhere in the State without finding that Sir James had been there last week or would be coming next.”ⁱ

The purpose of this exhibition is twofold: to engage and inform the local community about items from the collection that represent their history and their stories; and to promote the NNHC, its collection and its role.

Hence this exhibition has assiduously and artistically selected ten objects, which tell individual stories and collectively illustrate some of the major themes of the collection.

The coverage historically is considerable, from a mid-19th Century hunting jacket to a late 20th Century fishing lure.

And there is a fascinating range in-between – boots, books, bras, baby scales and more.

Having mentioned the Wigston’s fishing lure, which Eddie, Ian and Garth Wigston called the Tasmanian Devil and which they began mass producing in 1979: it is remarkable to think that Wigstons Lures – a tiny family business in New Norfolk – resisted a threat of legal action for eight years from one of the world’s most powerful and influential entertainment companies, Warner Brothers.

The fight was over use of the name “Tasmanian Devil”, which Warner Brothers had copyrighted for its cartoon character “Taz” the crazy Tasmanian Devil. Well, Wigstons eventually won out – talk about David slaying Goliath!

As Stuart Wigston said at the time: “It’s hard to believe something indigenous to Tasmania is registered by a huge, great multinational company. It’s unreal ...”ⁱⁱ

For Dick and me this exhibition evokes so many memories. The building itself, the LM Shoobridge Memorial Building was a child health clinic when I was a young mother in New Norfolk in the 1970s. My babies were winter babies and I well remember bringing them here to be weighed and checked by the child health nurse. What I remember most vividly was the blazing open fire which was such a warm and welcoming sight on the foggy winter days when it was common for the fog to lift for only a couple of hours in the middle of the day.

The Berlei maternity bra promotional display from Stella Potter’s baby and children’s clothing store in High Street also brings back memories. As well as

Stella Potter's, there were a number of clothing shops in the High Street in the 1970s: Colleen's Casuals and Audrey La Vogue for ladies' wear, Ron William's for men's wear and of course Ken O'Brien's drapery shop which also sold school uniforms for the all the schools in the Derwent Valley.

The Berlei maternity bra in the exhibition also brought back a number of less welcome memories ...

Athol Davey, The Last New Norfolk Railway Stationmaster's memorabilia brought back Dick's memories of catching the train home to New Norfolk from boarding school on Friday afternoons, a journey which took a couple of hours stopping at New Town, Moonah, Glenorchy, Claremont, Granton, Bridgewater, Dromedary, Rocks Road, Boyer and New Norfolk Station.

The fruitpickers' tins helps tell the story of small fruit growing in the Derwent Valley — the Henry Jones plant in Stephens Street and the Port Huon Fruitgrowers' Associations plant on Rocks Road. If anyone wonders happens to that particular building, we can tell you that part of it became the Warners' Orford shack!

The items in this exhibition will not only tell many different stories of life in the Derwent Valley but will awaken many buried memories as well. New Norfolk, as the third planned settlement in Van Diemen's Land after Hobart and Launceston, has such a rich history dating from the arrival of settlers from Norfolk Island in 1807 and 1808 and the mapping and naming of the town as Elizabeth Town by Governor Macquarie in 1811. And of course it had Government Cottage, built as country residence for Lieutenant Governor Davey during his term, 1813-1817, and used by subsequent Governors until 1848. All of which underlies the importance of the New Norfolk Historical Information Centre.

It now gives me great pleasure to open the New Norfolk Historical Centre 30th Anniversary Exhibition – "Memories of the Derwent Valley".

Thank you.

ⁱ *Jim Plim: Ambassador Extraordinary – A Biography of Sir James Plimsoll* by Jeremy Hearder, Ballarat, Connor Court publishing, 2015, page 335.

ⁱⁱ Quoted in *Tasmanian Devil: a Unique and Threatened Animal* by David Owen and David Pemberton, Crows Nest NSW, Allen & Unwin, 2005, page 163.