

**ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY (RCS) SOUTHERN TASMANIAN BRANCH
150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE RCS
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land—the Mouheneener people. 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:

- Senator David Bushby;
- Barry Smith, President, Royal Commonwealth Society Southern Tasmanian Branch;
- Pam Watkins, President, Northern Tasmanian Branch;
- Brendan Hanigan, President, Commonwealth Games Association Tasmania;
- Alistair Douglas, Tasmanian Branch Chairman, Order of Australia Association;
- Stephen Jones, Chairman, Royal Overseas League Tasmania;
- Reg Watson, President, Australian National Flag Association Tasmania;
- Alderman Simon Fraser, Glenorchy City Council.

One hundred and fifty is a significant anniversary by any measure, and it is perhaps not surprising that over that length of time the RCS has been preceded with numerous other names.

Thus at its inception in in 1868 it was called The Colonial Society; then the Royal Colonial Society when the royal charter was granted the following year.

Then from 1870 until 1928 it was the Royal Colonial Institute; after which it reverted to being a Society but, in keeping with changing circumstances was rebadged as the Royal Empire Society, which name remained until in 1958 the present Royal Commonwealth Society name was adopted. I guess this coincided with Empire Day changing its name to Commonwealth Day. I am old enough to remember Empire Day which we celebrated on 24 May with bonfires and fireworks – and commonly called it Cracker Night.

This being an anniversary function, I would like to quote to you the founding statements made back in 1868. The Hobart *Mercury* in its edition of Monday 7 September 1868 [page 2] ran together a whole sequence of unrelated items, which it rationalised with the words, “We have our usual files of English papers to the 17th of July, from which we extract the following:”

And prominent among the items is yours, and I quote:

“At a meeting, presided over by Viscount Bury, held on June 26th, at Willis-rooms, for the formation of a Colonial Society, the following resolutions were submitted and carried unanimously: That it is expedient to form a society, to be called The Colonial Society.

“That the objects of the society be as follows: to occupy as regards the colonies the position filled by the Royal Society with regard to science, or the Royal Geographical Society with regard to geography; that a lecture-hall, a library and reading-room, and a museum of science, industry, and commerce be opened as soon as the funds of the society will allow, where the natural products and resources of the colonies will be exhibited;

...

“That the Colonial Society be entirely non-political, and that any organisation for political purposes be forbidden by the fundamental rules of the society.”

End of quote. Now, I will read that last sentence again, for its adherence to notions of civility and decency, in the light of another piece of reportage which sits alongside what I have just read to you. So here is the sentence again:

“That the Colonial Society be entirely non-political, and that any organisation for political purposes be forbidden by the fundamental rules of the society.”

And here is the report that appears near it:

“A foretaste of the violence amid which the next general election is likely to be conducted was afforded on June 22nd in the Guildhall of the City of London. In response to a requisition, the Lord Mayor convened a meeting of the citizens to express their sentiments on Mr. Gladstone's [disestablishment of the Anglican Irish Church] Suspensory Bill.

“To judge from the disorder which characterised the proceedings from the commencement to the close, a large portion of the gathering appeared habitually to have had a longer experience of the internal arrangements of licensed houses than the interiors of churches.

“None of the speakers could be heard at a distance of two yards from where they stood. On the platform personal altercations took the form of actual conflict, and blows were at one time freely exchanged.

“The climax of the uproar was reached during a speech from Sir W. Rose. A general melee ensued, in the midst of which the alderman and Mr. Beales struggled violently together, fisticuffs on the part of those around them were next unsparingly resorted to, chairs were seized and cast by one party at the other, and it seemed as though the whole of the occupants of the vast building were about to engage in a series of running fights.

“It was now that the Lord Mayor, who had been struck twice or thrice in the breast, left the hall without putting any motion, leaving the contending factions to fight out their differences.”

End of that quote!

In conclusion may I say that as Patron of both the Southern and Northern Tasmanian Branches of the Royal Commonwealth Society, and indeed of the

Council of United Commonwealth Societies, I very much enjoy your company; and as Governor I appreciate the importance and relevance of your work in maintaining the close links that we have always had with the UK and with the Commonwealth of Nations.

It therefore remains for me to invite you to join me in a Toast to mark this milestone anniversary of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

[Toast]

Thank you.