

Foundation Day  
address by  
Past President Legatee Brian Armstrong

" Forty Years On "

"A month ago, in this room, we heard our Patron and very good friend, the Governor, deliver his charge at the opening of our Legacy Week. What he said brought to mind a stanza from an old song - a football song - sung by the old and present boys of a famous Public School, a cradle of British fighting men since James I was King.

In an odd way the verse seemed to reflect our Legacy circumstance and story, and as on a birthday occasion one is allowed a little licence, I thought I would try to build around it some thoughts and memories of this, our Melbourne Legacy, the first and the oldest of all the Legacy Clubs.

Here is the verse (with due apologies). I am sure it is already known to some of you :-

"Forty years on, growing older and older  
Shorter in wind, as in memory long,  
Feeble of foot and rheumatic of shoulder  
What will it help you that once you were strong.  
God give us bases to guard or beleaguer  
Games to play out, whether earnest or fun  
Fights for the fearless and goals for the eager  
Twenty and thirty and forty years on. "

Follow up - Follow up.

We need not, unfortunately for some of us, spend too much time over the relevance of the opening lines. We may have to some extent conquered space, we have charted the oceans and plumbed the vast deep, but we haven't done much to slow the stately tread of the old gentleman with the scythe. However, we can't be footballers for very long and I don't expect these opening words will cause distress to my good friends of the Old and Bold, or as an old Battalion mate of mine still calls us - "The Ruthless and Toothless".

Legacy's entry into the public view was not spectacular. You all know the story and it is written in the books. A wayward child, we were destined to have a striking change of character when we were only two years old. We have no Birth Certificate, "save" as the careful lawyers say, "as hereinafter provided". Our earliest papers were lost in a disastrous fire which destroyed the home and valuable library of the late Legatee Jimmy Downing.

In the beginning, we had no home which we could really call our own. We worked in odd rooms of the first Anzac House, in other people's homes and offices and in one study, which years later was to become known to thousands as the "Professor's study". Few of those thousands will ever know that the man who taught them so much over those years is one of the earliest names on our Legacy Roll, our first Vice-President, and a member of the first Deceased Soldiers' Children's Welfare Committee - the ancestor of Junior Legacy, - George Stephenson Browne.

For years we rented a dressed-up garret in Market Street, struggling to run the Girls' Classes there. The early Welfare boys had a small store of the children's kit and some secondhand clothing for mothers who were often in dire need. This was presided over by a character named George Knocks, one of our most faithful Legatees, an ex-R.N.R. seaman who could neither read nor write, but who knew to the last sand-shoe what was in that store. He gave the most hair-raising advice - by him called "Legal" - to the mothers, and was loved by every youngster in the place.

Our big brother - the R.S.L. - in those days only a stripling itself, was a little suspicious of us, as most big brothers are. We were called a variety of names - the Sydney Bulletin dismissed us as an "Ex-Officers' Self Admiration Society" and years later gave us one of the finest tributes Legacy has ever received. But a definition to cherish was bestowed on us by the wife of a respected Legatee (both have passed on), who explained to a sympathetic Bridge party that "Norman had joined a group of sentimental old fools who went around at night showing widows how to make their Wills!"

I said we had no Birth Certificate, but a few weeks ago there came into the hands of Legatee Frank Doolan and myself a treasure that I think may serve. This faded and dog-eared old fellow is the draft of our first Constitution, 1923/24, with comments written in by our late Founder - Legatee Stan Savige, as he then was, which indicate the shape of things to come. There is only time to look at two clauses. The first - in his own writing:-

"For the foundation of the "Legacy" Club we are indebted to Captain S. G. Savige, D.S.O., M.C., who was asked by Sir John Gellibrand to inaugurate the movement in Victoria. No less thanks are due to Major Forrest, Captain Selleck, M.C., Captain Pittard, M.C., and Captain Middleton, who met on several occasions to arrive at the best means of launching the scheme."

I doubt if we shall ever be closer to the source of Legacy than this.

In the second:-

"The interpretation of all Rulings is governed by the unwritten Law of Cobbers."

Save for the change of the last word to "Service" those words have remained at the end of our Rules to this day, and have gone far towards the unravelling of many awkward knots.

For a wayward child we had some wonderful Godfathers. Great men who had faith in us, and lent us their names and their influence :- Gellibrand, Monash, Chauvel and Brudenell White. You will remember I am speaking of the early years. All names recalling, in addition to courage and achievement, the same fine but unassuming dignity. No seekers after honors here, but all outstanding Australians in both War and Peace.

Not long ago I stood in the Memorial Hall of another great school - Winchester I think. The walls were lined with scores of small brass plates, each bearing a name which the school held in honored memory. I looked at the one nearest to me - "Wavell" it said - "Wavell, Field-Marshal". No mention of three Knighthoods or a string of decorations, but underneath, in small letters, these words: "And Glory is the least of things that follow this man home".

Forty years on, and looking back I think that wonderful epitaph fitted equally well the men I have mentioned. Perhaps we took our cue from them - "No fuss, get on with the job".

"What's in a name?" said the old Playwright 300 years ago. Sometimes a very great deal. A youngish man in a Naval uniform stands near our St. Paul's Cathedral, looking out to sea. "Matthew Flinders" says the granite beneath, "Matthew Flinders - Navigator". No more, but what a saga of courage and achievement that one word opens up.

And what, in all humility, does our word "Legacy" conjure up? To each of us, no doubt, something different, according to the period of our service and our particular interests. To the early ones, many pictures, grave and gay, many voices, two perhaps in particular, both on the brink of a discovery. One, rather triumphant, - "I've got it, we will call it "Legacy", but we will give instead of take, and look for nothing in return; and two years later, a quiet voice, still with us, thank Heaven, "Have you ever thought what the dying wish of our cobbers would have been?"

This was our link. On the one hand, the still sharp memory of the lost men of Anzac, France, Belgium, and the Middle East. One's own private nightmare - the expression in the eyes of the men of one's own Platoon, particularly towards the end, when they were warned for yet another operation. Men who by some miracle had survived twelve and more separate and individual hells between Gallipoli and Villers - Bretonneux and who knew full well that the Hindenburg line was yet to come. And then we lucky ones were home again, many to no better reward than disillusionment and actual want; and we learned, some for the first time, since we had only counted our unit losses, of the frightful toll levied on 60,000 Australian homes. And, finally, as you know full well, the visits to sad little homes, softening down the story of what had really happened to Bill or Harry or Jack, lying without remorse sometimes, and coming away with the dead feeling that here was a great debt still unpaid and that there was nothing more we could do to help.

But now, on the other hand, here it was, the link, the chance to do something of real personal value, something with a real future. We do not speak a great deal of these things, nor would I do so now if I were not sure that every one of you who wears this small badge has travelled much the same road. That is one reason also why many of the Old and Bold, with whom you may at times be a little impatient, still want to belong.

"God give us bases to guard and beleaguer" - No spirit can survive without action to sustain it. Legacy's bases are set out on Page 2 of our Diary. We don't call them bases, we call them Policy and Objects. Save for the addition of our work with the widows and children, and the inclusion of the Shrine of Remembrance, they are basically the same as they were 44 years ago. Have another look at them, you may get a surprise. We are pledged to support loyalty to the Throne and British Commonwealth - to see to it that the Shrine is held in proper respect; to support, in a proper case, the R.S.L. and the cause of ex-service personnel - and to play an active part in maintaining a high standard of citizenship.

There are some thoughtful Legatees who wonder at times, and I do not refer now to any particular time, whether we have become so preoccupied with our principal and best known task, that we tend to overlook the defence of some of our other bases or do our share of beleaguering some others. These are matters of Board Policy, and we have no truck with Politics, as such. But I have no doubt at all that many of the antics and posturings that are thrust upon our notice these days would have made the men who laid down our bases see a violent shade of red.

"Fights for the Fearless" - There have always been plenty of these. Here is our first Legacy Diary, 1925, belonging to Frank Meldrum, one of our original and finest Legatees who had hoped to be here today. No Badge appears yet and no "Flanders Fields" - they came in 1926. Twelve of the names in this Diary are still on our present Roll and seven of them are here on most Tuesdays.

The Diary shows 4 Committees of 3 men each. Now we have 58 and most of them represent a fight of some kind - a special effort to meet an emerging need, some extension of our job, the acceptance of a new challenge and the like.

Two early forays come to mind - a picture of two heroes - Legatees Stan Savige and Donovan Joynt, egged on by Legatees Aaron Beattie and Carl Carleton, and lavishly fortified by loving friends who hadn't got to go with them, confronting the young War Widows' Association with the demand, and with precious little to support it then, that Legacy should be given the temporary custody of their young sons and later, their daughters too. And another picture, the fight for the Shrine, and this was a fight to be remembered, against a vacillating Government and a hostile section of the Public and Press. Had it not been for the drive and determination of a group of Legatees led by Kem Kemsley and our full time warrior, Donovan Joynt again, there would have been no Shrine of Remembrance at all -

a Bridge, perhaps, a Hospital - outdated by now, or an inadequate Square at the top of the Bourke Street hill, which in later years, tired men might well have failed to reach; and one wonders what would have happened to our Pilgrimages and Marches on great National days.

There were many other battles - two for actual existence, one during the Depression, and the other in 1937 during the terrible Polio epidemic, Fights for the Classes, the Drill Halls, for finance - an ever present enemy - for freedom from Probate and stamp duties, and many more. Oh yes, there has been no lack of fights.

"Goals for the Eager" - I think it might be difficult to set down in four small words a better definition of Legacy's essential work. Isn't that just what we have been trying to achieve over 40 years and more? Houses for the homeless, shelter for the student, the camps, games to play out, health for the puny, advice for the worried in mind and body, jobs for the ambitious, education for everybody, and a final picture of a great-hearted Legatee, mortgaging his health and his profession to bring into existence and sustain over many years the Baillieu Education Trusts, which put on the ladder of progress and attainment hundreds of Legacy children, and opened to them goals and opportunities which they had never dreamed would be possible; Legatee Hugh Brain! Surely that one small phrase will cover them all.

Well, there it is. I commend to you the Spirit of Legacy. It is too precious a thing to be lost. I am more than proud to have been asked to speak to you today. Two World Wars have come and gone, and we have written two full chapters of the Legacy Story. The third is in the making, and who will dare to guess who will write the last one or what it will contain. Be sure there will be tiger country ahead. There always has been, but we have always got through.

John Masefield shows us a light - he says this to his wayfarer, unsure of his road -

"Therefore go forth, Companion; when you find  
No Highway more, no track, all being blind,  
The way to go shall glimmer in the mind.

Adventure on, for from the littlest clue  
Has come whatever worth man ever knew  
The next to lighten all men may be you! "

If we can adventure on, follow up the track our Founders chose and followed and as the Charter has it, "keep fair the name of Legacy" as, of course, we will, then as year succeeds year and the 25th of September comes around, we can say with truth, and perhaps a little pride too, that Legacy has really had Many Happy Returns of the Day. "

---

Tuesday the 26th September 1967 was observed for the first time by Melbourne Legacy as "Foundation Day", and in formally introducing Past-President Legatee Brian Armstrong as the speaker of the day, the President gave the following brief explanation of this first "Foundation Day" luncheon -

"Blatchford, in his history of Melbourne Legacy, states - 'The 25th September, 1923 is to be regarded as the date of inauguration of Melbourne Legacy since it was on that day that some of the office-bearers were appointed and draft rules and regulations were provisionally adopted.'

The Board of Management considered that it would be very fitting if the importance of this historical occasion in the life of Melbourne Legacy could be recalled annually, and it was unanimously decided that our weekly luncheon meeting on the Tuesday nearest to the 25th September each year should henceforth be known as "Foundation Day" luncheon. This is therefore our "Foundation Day" luncheon No. 1.

We are truly delighted to see so many very early members of Melbourne Legacy in attendance here today, and one of them in the person of Legatee Brian Armstrong who was inducted into Melbourne Legacy back in 1924 and who was elected President of this Club for the year 1937, has accepted the invitation to be our speaker of the day."