

Legatee Frank Doolan

Foundation day in September tends to focus on Legatee Stan Savige and his role in founding Legacy in 1923. But of course, there were many other legatees who were instrumental in the early years. One of them was Legatee Frank Doolan and his name crops up often in the archive.

In Stan Savige's biography WB Russell recounts that it was Legatee Doolan who suggested that *"the dying wish of any of our cobbers would be that we should look after his missus and kids"*. Also referred to as Legacy finding its soul, his quiet comments led to Legacy turning its focus to the children of deceased servicemen and the work that continues today.

To research Frank Doolan I've taken extracts from documents and speeches held in the archive. In some Frank Doolan gave many interesting insights into Stan Savige and other legatees making the archive a useful research tool.

Frank Doolan was born in 1896 in Armadale and educated in Ballarat and South Melbourne. He was articled to a firm of surveyors which meant he did not enlist until 1917. He served with Field Engineer Reinforcements 1st Div, Signals Coy. in France attaining the rank of Sapper. At the end of the war, he remained in England at a Survey School gaining extra skills. He completed his surveying qualification at the Working Man's College (now RMIT) in 1919. He joined forces with another ex-soldier Charlie Goodchild and they set up a surveying firm together. The firm hit troubles during the depression and Doolan was employed by another Legatee, Jim Gillespie. He then went on the lecture on Surveying at RMIT. Assisted by Legatee Alan Murray he moved to a position with the Valuer Sections of the Department of Interior. In 1950 he was promoted to be Chief Property Officer for Victoria, retiring in 1961.

His induction into Legacy was sometime in 1924 – so he technically misses the title of Founding Legatee. However his impact and length of service far surpasses such a minor detail. In 1974 Legacy first decided to award certificates for length of service, Frank was one of the first 10 men to receive a 50 year certificate. When he passed away in 1988 he had achieved 64 years dedicated to Legacy, equalled only by Legatee Kemsley.

(Legatee Doolan is standing second from left)



In all those years he was in countless committees and involved in many things. He was approached to take on position of President, but he never sought acclaim or a position of power. Legatee Bill Russell in Stan's biography has this to say – *"A mighty man this Doolan, lank and lean, with deep blue eyes set in a long serious face. Great, as only men of simplicity, sincerity and truth can be great. He was always in the background, but, that's the most important thing about it, always in the background whenever he was needed."*

FROM THE ARCHIVE (Continued)

To start helping the children in 1925 legatees established the DSCW – Deceased Soldiers' Children's Welfare Committee. This committee consisted of well-known names of Legacy – Savige, Joynt, Browne, Beattie, Pittard and Doolan. So, he was a foundation member of the committee looking after the first boys' gymnasium class and the literary and debating class.

In the late 1920s Legatee Doolan, Legatee Kemsley and Legatee Joynt VC, were in the select committee to reinstate the Shrine as the National War Memorial, and later to help raise funds for the cost of its erection. Legacy's fight for the Shrine is a separate story and Doolan was right in the thick of it.

As recorded in a document by Legatee Frank Doolan *"It was a great example of how Right can conquer Might as long as there is sufficient enthusiasm. This small band of almost unknown diggers with no finance and little influence succeeded in swaying the Government of the day, the combined Press and the general public and launched a financial appeal"* for funds.

With the proposal saved from extinction, several legatees participated in the building process and on the War Memorial Committee. The firm of Doolan and Goodchild surveyed the Shrine site and Frank Doolan laid out the foundations. His meticulous calculations ensure the ray of light falls on the Stone of Remembrance on 11th November for the next 5000 years.

His relationship with Stan Savige was interesting. Frank mentions *"Funny thing, I clicked with Stan Savige. I just don't know why. I can never understand why. Stan Savige at that time was a Captain, he had a DSO, MC, and he probably had as great a record of service, in active service as any man in any army in the First War."*

The term Legatee was adopted to remove the hierarchy of military ranks. Frank Doolan was an excellent example of this. As a legatee and friend of Stan Savige, he rubbed shoulders with Generals although he had only reached the rank of Sapper. Stan Savige *"took me to the Naval and Military Club (that dear old Syd Birrell used to call the 'nasal and millinery club'). And there I met all of the big men of the First War. If you were with Savige, you were with him. If we met Blamey, or if we met Talbot-Hobbs, or if we met Brudenell White, you were still with him."*

"Savige was a marvellous man and he affected my life tremendously. Now why a man of this performance and ability click with me, I wouldn't know. But he carted me around like a younger brother almost. He was all man, and if anything big was going on, he would say 'Well trot along home Frank – I'm in the mood', or something like that. . . . He had an in-built intuition, which is hard to explain but he could foresee trouble and he could foresee it soon enough to plan to circumvent it, and he did this on many occasions in the early planning of Legacy."

The Lone Pine Project was another Doolan effort. Suggested by Tom Griffiths, President of Warrnambool Legacy. It was Melbourne Legacy who took the task of propagation and distribution. The records from the 1960s and 1970s have Frank Doolan's distinctive handwriting all over them.



FROM THE ARCHIVE (Continued)

In recognition of his service, it was Legatee Doolan who was invited to plant the Olive Tree of Peace at the Shrine of Remembrance during the Golden Jubilee of Legacy in 1973. He said it was a highlight for him to do so.

Never one to seek the limelight, he was nervous to deliver the Toast to Legacy at the 1965 Conference in Perth. The archive has a copy of what he said and it shows a deep and thoughtful side to Frank Doolan. He likened *“the cause of Legacy to a rich and valuable cloak which shelters those we are privileged to serve, one and all.*

The foundation, woven into this cloak, did not just happen but was carefully designed by men of high calibre. The pure silver threads, which represent the great comradeship which we enjoy, and the golden threads, which represent service before self, are basic in the foundation handed down to us by the founders. Let us never forget that this unique organisation has grown from strength to strength on these indestructible elements.

On this foundation, further threads have been woven into the garment by men from all walks of life and from all States of the Commonwealth through the years of Legacy history. These additional threads have strengthened and enriched the cloak which we now display to the public as the image of Legacy.”

Legatee Frank Doolan died in 1988. In his eulogy it was mentioned Frank had a good friend, Jack Whiteacre, who was a former jockey, bookmaker and he bred horses in Mordialloc. When Jack died he appointed Frank as his sole executor and left him a race horse whose bloodline went back to a 1920s Melbourne Cup winner. This filly, called Tamwill, went on to give Frank great joy and win a number of races before being put to pasture on Legatee Geoff Handbury's property. By a strange coincidence Tamwill, aged 23, died on the same day as Frank Doolan.

Hopefully some of the above gives some insight into Legatee Doolan. And why comradeship is held in the Doolan Room named after him. He was a legatee who made a large impact on Legacy's history in many ways. A great example of the hard work of Legatees. which is done quietly, in the background, and has been done for the past 100 years.

Our archive is available on the Melbourne Legacy page of Victorian Collections. [Melbourne Legacy \(victoriancollections.net.au\)](https://victoriancollections.net.au/melbourne-legacy)

From Kathryn Leech, Research Officer, Melbourne Legacy
