

Foundation Day Address – 24 October 2024
By Past President, Legatee Graeme Plumridge

Legatee President Kerry, Legatees and Guests.

It is my pleasure to present the Foundation Day Address for 2024 and, as this year marks the 90th Anniversary of the dedication of the Shrine of Remembrance, I thought it would be fitting to recall this club's very close and enduring relationship with the Shrine. And, in doing so, reaffirm our commitment to the Shrine and what it represents into the future.

As soon as the First World War ended in 1918, a war memorial was proposed to be erected in Melbourne. There was a very real sense of debt and remembrance for those who had paid the price of victory. In the early 1920's the State Govt appointed the War Memorial Advisory Committee. One of our forebears, Legatee W.A.M. Blckett was a member of that first committee, not necessarily as a Legatee, but in his professional role as an architect. The first recommendation was an "Arch of Victory" over St Kilda Road.

A little later an Executive Committee was formed with General Sir John Monash as its driving force. That Committee soon abandoned the idea of the arch and after reviewing over 20 suggested sites, proposed a large, monumental memorial to the east of St Kilda Road, a position that would make it clearly visible from the centre of the city and one that would be surrounded by a large, open space.

A Competition was launched in March 1922 to find a suitable design. 83 entries came in from all around the world & in December 1923 the design by 2 Melbourne Architects, both of whom were veterans, Phillip Hudson and James Wardrop, was announced the winner.



The design was based on the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world) and the Parthenon in Athens.

The principal factor which dominated the decision was the view that the war had been fought to save democracy from tyranny and it was generally accepted that the origins of democracy were in Greece.

Another unique part of the design was the Stone of Remembrance, located in the sanctuary. Engraved on the stone are the words "Greater love hath no man". A ray of sunlight shines through an aperture in the roof and lights up the word "Love" at 1100hrs on 11th Day of the 11th Month, Remembrance Day. More about the Ray of Light later.



In January 1924, the Committee decided to let the Melbourne Newspapers view the design, prior to it being made public, on the strict instruction that they did not publish the design before the official date for disclosure. BIG MISTAKE.

Well, it's not hard to guess what happened!! The Age first published the design and then, of course so did the Herald. The Age supported the design while the Herald, published by Keith Murdoch, opposed the design. Keith Murdoch and John Monash didn't get on particularly well. That animosity went back to the war days when Murdoch had missed out on the official war correspondent role to Charles Bean and Monash was being lauded for his leadership on the battlefield. Murdoch thought the proposed Shrine was "too severe, stiff & heavy, that there is no grace or beauty about it and that it is a tomb of gloom".

The controversy went on for 2 years with the Herald and others putting up numerous alternative designs and suggestions. A hospital, a Roman Obelisk, homes for Widows, a tower with carillon bells, a 10,000 acre national park, a tablet on Mt. Donna Buang, an Eiffel Tower at the Exhibition Building. One of the Premiers of the day even chimed in with the suggestion of an arch over Princess Bridge with tea rooms on the top!

There were numerous other inventive ideas and finally an ANZAC Square and cenotaph was proposed at the top end of Bourke St. where it joins Spring St. - right in front of Parliament House. The square received significant support from the State Govt and other stakeholders including the RSL and Keith Murdoch's Herald.

It required the demolition of the Whitehart Hotel, which abutted the Windsor, and the Imperial Hotel on the other side of Bourke Street and, the obvious acquisition of the plots of land, none of which had been costed at that stage. The project was later abandoned when neither the State Govt nor the City Council were prepared to contribute to the cost of acquisition.

The State of Victoria had been very politically unstable during this period. There had been 8 different Premiers in 4 years. Melbourne Legacy was very supportive of the design for the Shrine and through the good auspices of the many influential Legatees, got the Age and the Argus on side and took every opportunity to push the design at RSL branches everywhere they could.

The Herald stepped up its campaign in favour of the ANZAC Square proposal and as I mentioned previously, had the RSL hierarchy on their side.

So, we had the 2 very influential returned servicemen's organisations, RSL and Legacy, at odds with each other. At this stage, Legacy was widely regarded as the most thoughtful of the two ex-service organisations and it had remembrance as one of its main objectives.

Remember, we were nearly called "The Remembrance Club"! Many men, as they were in those days, were members of both organisations, as they are today.

It was at this point that Legacy became seriously involved in the campaign for the Shrine of Remembrance.

At a normal club meeting on 6 July 1926, Maj Gen Sir John Gellibrand, our Patron at the time, and guest speaker at the meeting, strongly urged that Legacy should come out actively and support the ANZAC Square proposal.

The Chairman of the meeting, when thanking the General, moved a motion, "That the Club take the advice of our patron and pass a resolution strongly advocating that course". The General was held in very high regard and after a period of uneasy silence, it seemed that the resolution might be passed. However, one Alfred Newcombe "Kem" Kemsley, rose to his feet and said, "***I object***" and then in words indelibly etched in our history, and the Shrine's history, said, "*I object to the Club passing this nebulous proposition that none of us has considered*". The Chairman withdrew the motion and agreed to a discussion at a special meeting.

It was then that our Forebears went to work and advocated at every possible opportunity in the media (the Argus and the Age in particular), presenting in picture theatres and RSL sub-branches.

In 1927, the Duke of York, Prince Albert, later King George VI, visited Melbourne and was Guest of Honour at an ANZAC eve dinner hosted by the RSL. The Prime Minister Mr Stanley Bruce was to be in attendance and the keynote speaker was to be Gen. Sir John Monash.

At this point Sir John was known to be a little conflicted. As a Senior Civil Servant, he felt his loyalties were split between his Government, who were still in favour of the ANZAC Square proposal, and the men with whom he had served, who were strongly in favour of the Shrine proposal. He made no secret of his personal support of the Shrine proposal.

Legatee Kemsley saw an opportunity and enlisted the assistance of Legatee Donovan Joynt and together they endeavoured to convince Sir John to promote the Shrine design in his address. Legatee Joynt VC enlisted 22 other VC winners to attend the dinner (They were all entitled to as they were all RSL members) along with other Legatees. They assured Sir John that he would get a standing ovation **if** he supported the Shrine proposal in his address.

They stacked the meeting and Sir John, after he had finished his prepared speech, went on to strongly support the Shrine proposal. He got a tumultuous and sustained standing ovation right on cue. Shortly afterwards, at the RSL's Annual Conference, Legatee Joynt addressed the conference very strongly in favour of the Shrine and finally the RSL was in support of the Shrine proposal.

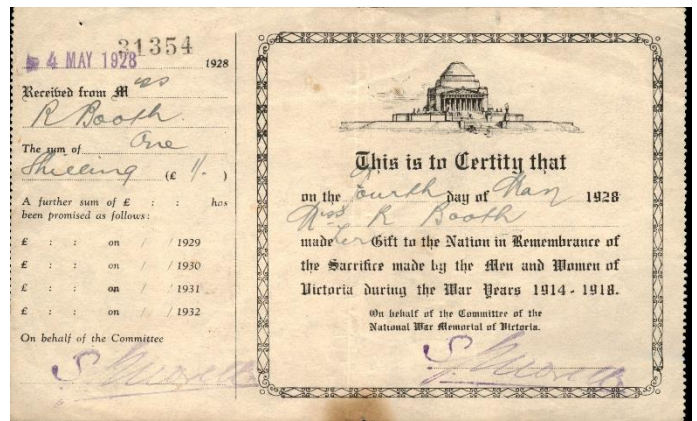
The **National War Memorial Committee** placed on record that the successful restoration of public support for the Shrine of Remembrance and the Domain site was almost wholly due to the efforts of the Legacy Club.

By Armistice Day 1927, a fundraising Committee, with Sir John Monash as chief fundraiser, and made up mostly of Legatees, had enough confidence, having received \$20k of a \$50k commitment from the City of Melbourne and \$15k of a \$50k commitment from the State Govt to have the foundation stone laid.

Now the fundraising started in earnest and the \$250k needed was raised in less than 6 months. Of the \$250k, \$79k came directly from public subscriptions. Legacy Clubs were very influential in raising that amount. School children were also encouraged to fund raise and donate pennies for the construction of The Shrine and contributed a massive \$9k.

In present value terms, \$250k in 1927 would equate to something in the order of \$25m today and the \$9k raised by the school children would be in the order of \$1m.

The first practical step in the construction was the site survey and the first peg was driven in September 1927 by Mr Frank Doolan of Doolan and Goodchild, surveyors. Frank Doolan was a Legatee and as site surveyor was also the one who ultimately had to solve the problem of putting the astronomical and mathematical calculations for the ray of light into reality. The work obviously pre-dated the silicon chip and it is believed that the mathematical calculations ran to 144 pages. No mean feat, and a credit to Legatee Doolan.



Two portions of a donation receipt - the third portion, with the donor's name, is entombed under the Shrine

In 1971, at the youthful age of 79, Legatee Doolan was again called upon to assist in recalculating the changes needed to accommodate the introduction of daylight saving.

Construction was finally completed in September 1934 and The Shrine was dedicated on 11 November 1934 by the Duke of Gloucester. A crowd of 300,000 turned out on that Remembrance Day.

On 30th August 1933, a Bill for a Trust to take over the responsibility of the management and maintenance of the Memorial and its surroundings was passed by the Govt of Victoria. Trustees were appointed by the Governor in Council for life. In 2000 the Act was changed and Trustees are now appointed by the Governor in Council for fixed terms with the ability to be re-appointed. Of 10 Trustees, 4 are nominated specifically, the Chair, the Lord Mayor, a representative from the RSL and a representative from the Legacy Club of Melbourne.

The Honour Roll of Legatees who have served as Trustees includes:

- Alfred “Kem” Kemsley who served for a remarkable 53 years with 5 as Chairman
- Rex Hall
- Colin McClymont
- Peter Isaacson
- George Mackenzie
- David Ford
- Adrian Lombardo
- David Kelly
- David Grierson
- Chris Spence – Chairman 9 years
-
- Catherine Bunny Carrigan
- And I am currently your representative.

Our enduring relationship with the Shrine has seen the Legacy Garden of Appreciation dedicated and the sculpture of the Widow and Children by Louis Lauman installed in 1998. Lauman is also responsible, among many others, for the sculptures of the sportsmen and women around the MCG.



The Legacy Olive Tree of Peace, commemorating our first 50 years, was planted in the reserve by Legatee Frank Doolan during our 50th anniversary celebrations in 1973. It was transplanted as a mature tree into the Garden Courtyard in 2003. Many of the plants in the Garden Courtyard have been selected because they are native to the Mediterranean theatres of war in which Australians have served. The Legacy Olive tree is the centre piece of that garden.



In 1933, two of the original Lone Pine Trees propagated by Mrs R Gray of Grassmere near Warrnambool were given to our own founder Stan Savige “to do with them as seemed best to him”. He offered one to the Shrine and it was planted close to the monument. The other was planted at Wattle Park where the 24th Battalion had its parade ground.

The tree at the Shrine flourished (shown at right c.2007) but became diseased and has since been replaced by an original descendant and re-dedicated by students after Legacy’s Annual ANZAC Commemoration for Students in 2017. You would be aware that we still retain responsibility for the distribution of those descendant seedlings.



Today The Shrine functions as a memorial to all Australians who have served in any war or peacekeeping and peacemaking operations. It hosts ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day as well as our own Widows Remembrance Service and ANZAC Commemoration Service for Students along with over 250 other commemoration ceremonies, including a weekly Last Post Service at 1645hrs every Sunday.

The Last Post Services are themed to coincide with events, battles or operations that took place about the same time in the years gone by.

In the last 12 months, over 660,000 people visited the Shrine and now, with services being live streamed, total engagements exceed 1.77million in a 12 month period.



A Legacy run Anzac Commemoration for Students in 2019

Interestingly, for the last 2 years, the Shrine has been listed in the top 10% of worldwide attractions by Trip Advisor.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the upkeep, care and maintenance of the building and the Reserve which covers some 13 hectares.

Its Vision is that all Victorians remember, value and commemorate service and sacrifice.

Its Mission is to engage all Victorians in commemoration through reflection, ceremony, education and learning.

And the Board faces some serious challenges these days. Not that long ago, nearly every household was affected by war service either directly or through association. Today of course with Victoria and more specifically Melbourne, having such a rich mix of cultural backgrounds, the understanding of remembrance associated with war service is severely compromised.

Indeed, the proportion of Australians that have been born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas ie. Second generation is now above 50%.

As the community continues to change, the Shrine needs to remain relevant into the future. It must maintain its function as a significant heritage place of remembrance and commemoration, whilst also becoming a place that welcomes an increasingly diverse community.

Difficult, certainly, but the Shrine will endure and we, The Legacy Club of Melbourne, must continue to respect and honour the role that is legislated for us on the Board of Trustees.

“We will remember them”.