

ROTARY CLUB OF STRATHFIELD

45TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ADDRESS BY PAST PRESIDENT ROGER VINCE

MEETING WEDNESDAY 30TH MARCH 2016

President Allan has asked me to reflect on the first year of the Rotary Club of Strathfield how we became a Rotary Club and the process necessary to achieve this. I have also included some history of this Club and how Rotary came to Australia 95 years ago.

1971 was a landmark year for Rotary in Australia. Not only was the Rotary Club of Strathfield formed, but Rotary International held their 62nd Annual Convention in Sydney in May 1971 when Rotary in Australia was celebrating 50 years since the organisation was first established here.

How Rotary began in Australia

The first club was started in Melbourne and the second in Sydney. Perhaps Sydney could have had the first club if it had not been for the Royal Easter Show! As Paul Henningham writes in his book "75 YEARS OF SERVICE – ROTARY IN AUSTRALIA 1921 TO 1996" it was a delegation of Canadian Rotarians, led by James Davidson, who arrived in Sydney 95 years ago this month to introduce Rotary to Australia but was thwarted in Sydney because of the Easter Holiday break which in those days lasted 2 weeks. As someone aptly put it 'Sydney was closed – it was Show Week'.

It is interesting to guess the reason for the choice of a Canadian delegation which was sent to Sydney by the then Association of Rotary Clubs, the forerunner to Rotary International. The American Rotarians, who included the founder of Rotary Paul Harris, may have thought the Canadians had closer Empire ties with Australia. We had fought alongside the Canadians through the Great War. They were family, the Americans were friends. The delegation from Canada did interview several people in Sydney and they were encouraged by the response but astonished by the general use of first names and lay back attitude but it was Easter holiday time.

They received a better response in Melbourne where they met the Sir John Monash, who helped to lead the allies to victory in the Great War. He agreed to accept charter membership of the proposed new RC of Melbourne and became its second president. The new Melbourne Club held its inaugural meeting on April 21 1921 with a membership of 37.

On returning to Sydney some very influential men were also persuaded to become charter members of the new Rotary Club of Sydney – Sir Henry Braddon, future Premier of NSW – Sir Edgeworth David the famous polar explorer and Sir Thomas Bavin – another future Premier of NSW amongst other eminent business and professional men.

The first Sydney Club meeting was held on May 17 1921 with 35 charter members. Also present were the two Canadian Commissioners, 3 visiting Rotarians from the new Rotary Club of Melbourne and a visiting Rotarian from Calcutta. Rotary had arrived in Australia with the formation of 2 Clubs with a membership of 72.

The genesis of Strathfield Rotary

I mention all this information because a similar process would be used to charter the new Rotary Club of Strathfield 50 years later in 1971. On the 1st July 1970 Harry Pickett became Governor of District 268. At that date the District consisted of 53 Rotary Clubs with an area bounded by Burwood in the east, Lithgow in the west, Liverpool in the

south-west, Windsor in the north-west and Toukley to the north on the Central Coast. The area also included the council areas of the Northshore, Warringah, Hornsby and the Hills District. A very large area for a DG to cover without the aid of Assistant Governors as is the case at present.

Harry Pickett was inducted as a member of the Rotary Club of Burwood in 1959 and served in many roles on the Board before he became Club President in 63-64 and then nominated, and becoming District Governor 1970 -71.

Our Mother Club the Rotary Club of Burwood was chartered on 2nd December 1939. Up to the formation of the RC of Strathfield they had chartered 5 daughter clubs and from these clubs 8 granddaughter clubs were established.

The driving force behind the formation of the new Rotary club of Strathfield was well known Strathfield resident, PP Cliff Francis who was DG Harry's Special Representative. He was ably assisted by PP Keith Grant and VP Ken Morrow and other members of Burwood who were led by President Alan Harley in 1970-1971.

Their task was to work out the boundaries of the new Club and find suitable members who fitted into the strict classification criteria of the day. To form the new club both the RC of Burwood and the then RC of Lidcombe had to cede territory to form the new RC of Strathfield. The classification system we now enjoy is much more flexible than what was in place then. One very important change which affected the composition of the new club was enacted at the Council on Legislation in 1968. This was the residential qualification for membership enabling recruitment of people who lived within its boundary but had their place of business elsewhere. This was not possible previously and was an important change as history shows this Club has generally been a club with a high residential membership. This new classification rule enabled PP Cliff Francis and his team to broaden their search for members. At this time there was an Additional Active Classification but the member had to be working in the same organisation and this requirement was not changed until 1977 when somebody in another profession or business could be nominated by the member.

It is unclear how long it took to find 24 men, no women in Rotary at that time, who would become the charter members of the new Rotary Club. Charter member Peter Foss said they did meet informally several times before the first recorded meeting on 10th March 1971. DG Harry and his team submitted all the necessary forms to RI in Evanston. The charter document was signed in Chicago by the then RI President William E Walk and the General Secretary George R Means before returning to Australia to be signed by DG Harry Pickett. DG Harry had his District 268 Conference on the weekend of 12 -14 March 1971 at the Central Coast Leagues Club at Gosford where he no doubt told the 1050 Rotarians and Partners present the good news of the formation of the new RC of Strathfield.

The official presentation of the charter was held at a formal dinner at Macquarie University on 19th April 1971. The Charter President was Bill Boyce – Vice President Don Killip – Secretary Bill Veitch – Treasurer Brian Cullen-Ward and the Board – Peter Bass, Geoff Hunt, Gordon Gillett, Don Rich and the Sergeant at Arms – Ron Thurgar.

Very fortunately there was a hand written weekly attendance book showing not only the attendance record of members but details and dates of inductions and resignations up to 1987. During that first year there were 3 resignations of charter members and sadly the death of Leo Langley also a charter member whose classification was taken by his son Ron on 9th May 1972. In the Clubs first year to 30th June 1972 there were 12 new members inducted - making a total at the end of that first year 32. The first new member inducted post Charter Night was Keith Maher on 8th September 1971 others who joined up to 30 June 1972 were Larry Burgin, Bernie Farthing, David Gilbert, Barry

Hughes, Maurie Kessel, Maurie Moroney, Ken Mountford, Barry Nix, Wal Simmond and Roger Vince.

During the presidencies of first President Bill Boyce and second President, Peter Roach, the Club met at the Strathfield Recreation Club. During Clarrie Edwards year, 73/74, we moved to West Strathfield Bowling Club where we remained for over 6 years until President Brian Hennell 80/81 and his Board decided to move the meeting venue because of catering problems. Then there was a brief time at the Town and Country Motel, South Strathfield and the Flemington Markets Club, both were unsuitable because of noise and the need for larger accommodation as there were now over 50 members. The move was made to South Strathfield Bowling Club later in Brian's year and there we remained for over 20 years. During Keith Stockall's year, 2003 -2004, we moved to Strathfield Golf Club.

Reflection

During the last 45 years we have celebrated our birthday in style - after 15, 21, 25, 40 years and now 45 years – how the years have flown and how Rotary has changed – no song now at meetings – membership has certainly changed, women now very welcome as members unlike the early days. When the Club was chartered the members were all youngish and all certainly working full time but they always found time to come to Rotary on a Wednesday evening.

Charter President Bill Boyce, was the very first Paul Harris Fellow in the RC of Strathfield and this award was accepted by his wife Thelma on Bill's behalf on 21st August 1980 by President Lew Wilson. This was the start of many presentations of this award over the next 36 years.

In closing, I would like to quote some words from DG Harry's address at the Charter Night at Macquarie University on 19th April 1971:

"Tonight's ceremony marks an auspicious occasion for the community of Strathfield. Leading business and professional men of this community have banded together to form a Rotary Club accepting the constitution and by-laws of Rotary International and agreeing to further the object of Rotary.

This new Rotary Club of Strathfield formed by men who accept Rotary's philosophy of 'Service above Self' and who will exemplify high ethical standards in business and professional life, aided by the friendship and fellowship of Rotary will add to the wellbeing and way of life of the community."

PP Roger Vince 30/03/2016