

(The following Eulogy was written by John Fitzgibbon. It was delivered at the funeral service for James William Hickey 2nd June 2006. Jim passed away on 29th May 2006. The service was held in the Chapel of North West Funerals and he was buried at the Murray Pines Lawn Cemetery.)

Good morning - On behalf of Alma and Jim's children – Wesley, Judy, Noel and Gail – I extend a special welcome and thank you for joining us today

Welcome to a celebration to honor the memory of a loving husband, a loving companion, a father, a grandfather, a great-grandfather, a colleague, a friend and a mate

And a special thank you to all of you who offer Alma and Jim's family, comfort and support during a time of loss and sadness

Alma and the family extend an invitation to you to join them at the RSL Club after the service at the Murray Pines Cemetery for morning tea and further memories

When I sat down to consider what I would say about Jimmy this morning I didn't at first turn to great scholars and poets, or even journalists or scribes but I found some writings by Jim himself and spend several hours reading and dreaming of memories upon which the words were written.

In 1995 as the President of Irymple Rotary I ask Jim to write for us a history of our Club to celebrate our first 25 years. Jim was our Historian at the time and undertook the task with his usual enthusiasm and endeavor.

When writing in the book in memoriam about Rotarians who had left our lives Jim wrote:

“During the past 25 years, the Rotary Club of Irymple has grieved the passing of many of its valued members to their home beyond the sunset.”

Jim then drew on the words of William Cowper's Hymn:

“What peaceful hours we once enjoyed
How sweet their memories still
But they have left an aching void
The word can never fill”

Today Jimmy those same words you wrote in 1995 are for you and I add a later verse that never made it into the short story of the Rotary Club:

“What peaceful hours we once enjoyed
How sweet their memories still
But they have left an aching void
The word can never fill

They who think that you are gone,
Because no more your face they see,
Are wrong, for in our hearts you live
And always will in memory”

James William Hickey was born in Sheffield, England in May 1913. He was brought to Australia by his parents in 1914 with the hostilities of the Great War just beginning. Not before they experienced the first raids by German Zeppelins over Dover and the shelling of their transport to the new world, the SS Waipara.

Jim would never forget his background and history; however he was for ever Australian to his bootstraps and proudly proclaimed his new heritage.

Jim attended school in Brisbane as a very good scholar who may well have been destined for higher educational honors as his later application to endeavor and his appreciation of continued learning would attest. The times however dictated that he leave school at 15 and take up an apprenticeship with a printing firm.

Jim assured us that the workplace agreement of the time was a 48 hour week including Saturdays and the return 3/6 (35 cents)

It was during this time in his life that Jim began his involvement in the support of others and the Community. He found his calling in the Methodist Church and in particular in the Sunday School from where he had graduated all classes. He returned as a teacher then as a Superintendent of the largest Methodist school in Australia

He combined his teaching in the church with his thirst for knowledge and studied theology, becoming a Methodist preacher by the time he was 20

Those who remember Jim sitting peacefully in his chair, singing along quietly to many a tune, will not be surprised that his singing with the church choir led to roles with the Brisbane Philharmonic and others

On completion of his indentured time Jim gained employment as foreman for printers in Toowoomba where he also continued his involvement with the church and the choir

It was 1934 and the supercharged Morris MG was the fastest thing on the roads at the time. Imagine the young Jim behind the wheel driving regular test runs at high speeds between Toowoomba and Brisbane in company reliability trials.

It was maybe here that Jim developed or first displayed a sharp-edged competitiveness and a steely focus of attention

The same attributes would serve him well during his days as a successful A Grade Cricketer and more than competent soccer and tennis player. This were the same skills he brought later to golf and bowls for those of us who remember many tussles on local greens

By 1942 Citizen Jimmy Hickey had become Leading Aircraftman James Hickey with AFHQ Signals. I sure there were plenty of officers who saw in Jim, his amazing attention to the most intricate of detail and his burning quest to sort, categorize and file every morsel of information.

These skills would see him actively employed during the Conflict in the Islands to our North as an enemy aircraft-spotter, watching from isolated, dangerous locations for Japanese action and recording every vital detail

On his enlistment papers Jim records his height at 5 foot 4 inches. I can only imagine at the recruiting station a young Jim stretching as high as he could on his toes to reach this height. Let no-one be mistaken though he may not have been 5 foot 4, he stood tall in commitment to duty and honor

During his period of service in defense of his country, Jim met and befriended Jack McDonald and Alison Joyce Mulready.

Friendship became a much deeper relationship and on 2nd September 1944 at the Methodist Church in Preston Joyce and Jim were married.

Jack invited Jim to join him in business in Red Cliffs and Joyce and Jim more to Sunraysia and Sunnyland Press began. He was to later relinquish his involvement at Red Cliffs to move to Robinvale and a new printing office. In January 1969 the first edition of the new Robinvale Sentinel rolled off the presses and the town had a newspaper

After the break with the war Jim was soon active again in the Community through the Red Cliffs Youth Club, the steering committee for the present Red Cliffs Club and the North West Ambulance Service.

As well at this time his life at home was enhanced with the addition of Wesley, Judy, Noel and Gail

Jim served with the State Emergency Service. He was an honorary probation officer and an advisor to the visiting magistrate dealing mainly with children

Also during these years Jim began an involvement that was to become a life-long passion with community service clubs. He joined the Lodge in 1952 and Red Cliffs Rotary in 1962.

Jim retained his love of sport and outdoor activity for as long as his health was to permit. Many will still remember his tenacity and doggedness with both the club and the bowl. As always Jim was also a worker and was well respected and appreciated at clubs such as Red Cliffs Golf Club and Irymple Bowls Club. At Irymple they could not have had a treasurer with a greater degree of attention and accuracy.

Following the sad passing of Joyce in 1981 Jim found friendship with Alma King. Their wonderful love for one another in later life brought great joy and strength to Jim as he often told.

Theirs was a relationship of loved and loving companions. As Alma said: "You were my friend in life and I will never forget you"

In recent years Jim sought the assistance of firstly Ted Crane and later myself to ensure that when he left Alma would be supported and assisted as he wished. Jim spent much time and effort seeking to achieve this.

In Rotary Jim found a home which he embraced with a passion. A member for 44 years at Red Cliffs, Robinvale and Irymple, Jim's devotion to the Rotary ideal of "Service Above Self" was only dimmed by his sad passing on Monday.

Jim held many portfolios in Rotary and is remember for many achievements. In 1992 his service was recognized by the Rotary Club of Irymple when he was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship and the citation:

“In appreciation of the tangible and significant assistance given to the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations between peoples of the world.”

In 1991 Jim won for the Rotary Club, the Ivor Lewis Trophy, a state trophy for outstanding contribution to public relations through his production of our Rotary bulletin

The quality of this document, carefully and lovingly published every week of the year was a work of art to be enjoyed. It contained a lifetime of publishing and printing skill.

When we did not win the trophy again the next year I fondly remember us trying to calm him as he hopped from one foot to the other in frustration. In reality the judges were never going to let us win two years in a row.

In the end we told him we had lost by a ½ a point and he was satisfied!

In 1995 when I was looking for a history to be published there was no where else to go but to Jimmy. I should have realized then that this might not be the best move for me.

Before I had finished asking him, Jim was up and away organizing the publication. I found myself for more than 12 months with a fox terrier constantly at my heels compelling everybody he could find including myself into action.

Today our small booklet has only real interest to members of the Rotary Club but I regard it as a treasure – it is the preservation of our most precious jewels – our memories

Alma - I know that you are feeling a great loss and sadness. I know you will worry about loneliness. We cannot replace the love and companionship you shared with Jim. As family and friends gather with you today they offer a hand that may help you through the time.

Jimmy in our small book you told us of:

“What peaceful hours we once enjoyed

How sweet their memories still”

When you were preparing our book, you found this verse but it was too long to use. You left it in your file. Today Jim I use it just for you:

Heaven's gate swung gently open,
The Master called softly, "Come,"
And you, Jimmy, took the Master's hand,
And your work on earth was done.
We'll never cease to miss you,
And shed many silent tears,
Because we cannot share with you
Our hopes, our joys, our fears.
But one day, in God's garden,
When the Master calls us to come.
You'll be at the gates with open arms
And say to us, "Welcome Home!"

God Bless Jim

God Bless us all